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LADY TRENT'S DAUGHTER

BY

ISABEL C. CLARKE

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LADY TRENT'S DAUGHTER

A NOVEL

BY

ISABEL C. CLARKE

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO

BENZIGER BROTHERS

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LADY TRENT'S DAUGHTER

CHAPTER I

OLAVE TRENT

MISS ARDERN had just laid aside her knitting, because it was getting too dark to see comfortably, and also she did not wish to miss the sunset, as she expressed it. It had been her habit to watch it for the last five and twenty years, whenever, indeed, a visible sun had been there to set behind the gaunt stark range of Cotswold Hills which reared themselves in front of the three long windows of the library at Nether Cheldon Manor.

The evening had followed upon a perfectly lovely day in early June. The morning had begun with a thick white mist that had clung tenaciously, even after the sun had risen and disclosed the clear outline of the hills, to the village of Nether Cheldon that lay down in the hollow of the valley below the Manor House. It had enveloped it indeed rather like a snug winter blanket, and had revealed with its filmy trailing scarf of gossamer the narrow and twisting course of the Chell. And afterward when the sun had finally triumphed, dispersing that white mist, there had supervened a golden day with just a hint of crispness in the air at first, but with sunshine that blazed prodigally for nearly a dozen hours, playing deliciously upon the long grass of the meadows, and gilding the splendid emerald of the beech and chestnut woods that clothed the charming little valley.

And now the day was done. It had been as eventless as were all the days that glided so smoothly, with such happy monotony, over the

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Manor House and its little group of occupants. Miss Ardern had spent the morning in the garden, donning an apron and a pair of strong loose gloves to equip her for the task she enjoyed. And while she was gardening Olave had come out for half an hour and had knocked about the croquet balls, trying to induce her aunt to come and have a game, an invitation which Miss Ardern had not, however, accepted. It was quite useless, she alleged in that pleasant way of hers, to begin a game when you have only half an hour to spare, for at the end of that time Olave, who was only sixteen, would have to return to the school-room and the strenuous instructions of Mademoiselle. After luncheon Miss Ardern had written some letters, and later she had motored over to Cheldon Park to visit their neighbors the Mercers. Olave had accompanied her, for there were girls of her own age at the Park. There had been no time for Miss Ardern to go down to the village and visit some of the inhabitants with whom, in many cases, she had enjoyed a lifelong friendship. But that could be postponed with perfect propriety until to-morrow, since there was no sick person just then who required special attention.

Miss Ardern's placid and uneventful life moved always in the same groove of minor activities, performed by her with admirable punctuality, method, and even zeal, year in and year out. Her type is rapidly disappearing which to many persons must be a source of regret. In a restless age Miss Ardern was calm and slow and cool. She had lived all her life of forty-five years at Nether Cheldon, seldom leaving her home, and always returning to it, when she did, with an enthusiasm that was unchangeably fresh and vigorous. She was the elder by ten years of two sisters, the only children and

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co-heiresses of the late Hammond Ardern, Lord of the Manor of Nether Cheldon and Cheldon Parva, and a Justice of the Peace for the County of Gloucestershire. For the last twenty-five years Miss Ardern had ruled over the household at the Manor. She was only twenty when her mother died, and she stepped into that late lady's shoes, assuming the reins of government with such efficiency that people wondered sometimes if Mr. Ardern missed his beautiful restless wife quite as much as was commonly supposed. She brought up the little Felicity, her sister, with as much indulgent tenderness and quite as competently as Mrs. Ardern could possibly have done. It could not be imagined that any human being, mother or sister, could have saved Felicity from her fate. It was, as the Arabs say, bound about her neck or, perhaps, to speak more correctly, written in her eyes that possessed so strange and haunting a beauty. Beautiful, spoiled and incredibly wilful, Felicity Ardern had married, when only seventeen, a dissolute young man called Sir Digby Trent. Except for the death of her parents this wedding had been the only event of supreme importance that had taken place at Nether Cheldon during Agnes Ardern's lifetime, and it stood out prominently in her remembrance as the climax of an uncomfortable, unsettled period, full of anxiety and suspense.

It is true that Mr. Ardern, even then in failing health, had opposed the marriage as violently as was possible to an indolent, delicate, and weak-willed man. He doted, just as his wife had done, upon the beautiful, engaging Felicity. He did not want her to marry and leave Nether Cheldon. If it had been Agnes now— But Agnes at twenty-seven years old had never been sought in marriage, and Sir Digby was desperately in love with Felicity.

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An attempt had been made to prevent them from seeing each other, but it was soon discovered that the younger Miss Ardern, with the help of a perfidious maid, was meeting him clandestinely in the woods of Ardern's Knoll. It was further reported that an elopement was being planned. Mr. Ardern had not the strength of character requisite to deal with such a situation, and he gave a reluctant consent to the engagement. It did once occur to his singularly unpractical mind to suggest to Sir Digby that both in years and in character Agnes would be better suited to him than his darling Felicity. But on second thought he relinquished the idea, remembering that Agnes was far more essential to his personal comfort than was his younger daughter. If the one contributed youth and joyousness and beauty to the grey old Manor House, from the other most indubitably proceeded the source of that suave comfort, the well-oiled domestic mechanism and the meticulous order that prevailed there. Under Agnes' careful régime these details had attained to a perfection far in advance of her mother's accomplishment.

Sir Digby was one of the few people for whom Agnes had ever entertained a feeling that bordered on sharp dislike. She would have done anything to stop the marriage, but it lay quite out of her power to do so, especially after her father's consent had been given. She did not hide her aversion quite successfully from Felicity, and for a few months there had existed for the first and only time a little breach in the mutual devotion of the two sisters. The wedding took place with as much splendor as was possible in the ancient Norman church at Nether Cheldon, and, certainly, Felicity's good fairy must have absented herself rigorously from the ceremony. Few had predicted well of the marriage which, how-

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ever, surpassed the gloomiest prognostications. Sir Digby wearied of Felicity before the year was out, and had, moreover, revealed to his young bride certain failings which inspired her first with disgust and then with actual terror. In a word he was intemperate, and more than once he had used violence toward her. She returned to the Manor and there a few months later her child, a little girl, was born. Sir Digby never saw his daughter, and he died, much to the relief and satisfaction of all connected with him, when Olave was only six months old. Especially had it been a solace to Mr. Ardern to know that his daughter was free. He himself did not long survive these events that had so rudely interrupted the peace of his declining years, and after his death Agnes became the joint owner but sole mistress of the Manor House. Lady Trent had taken a dislike to the place and preferred to live in London when she was not traveling abroad, an occupation that claimed a good deal of her time Almost from the first she had left her daughter to Agnes Ardern's care.

"You brought me up so well, Aggie," she used to say, "and you have so much more experience than I have, that I feel I can leave Olave confidently to you. But don't please spoil her more than you can help. We must stop her from making the same mistakes that I've made."

The great and absorbing love of Agnes Ardern's life had been strongly centralized round the person of her sister. As child and woman she had loved her with a sentiment that almost approached adoration. She would have stood between her and all possible peril, and it had been none of her fault that when that peril drew near she had been powerless to save her sister from it. And Felicity had not always been indifferent or unresponsive. If she

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were selfish herself she could perceive and appreciate unselfishness in others. She knew the solid worth of Agnes' character, and she had even had at times fugitive glimpses of her own comparative unworthiness. The little breach between the two, consequent upon Agnes' unconcealed disapproval of Sir Digby Trent, quickly vanished when Felicity began to share her sister's sentiments toward him. It was now almost forgotten and their friendship, in spite of Lady Trent's long absences from Nether Cheldon, was as close and intimate as ever.

It never, however, occurred to Felicity to take less advantage of her sister's unselfishness, or to relieve her shoulders of any burden with regard to the property, or even with regard to Olave herself. Why should she—Felicity—be bothered with Olave? She had not wanted a child, and this one only served to remind her of a period that had been peculiarly disagreeable, a part of her life that she would most willingly have forgotten. To be a widow at nineteen with a six months old infant was not a situation that appealed to young Lady Trent, and it evoked no stirring of maternal tenderness in her heart. Her dislike, or rather indifference, to Olave dated from that crying and screaming phase of early infancy through which so many delicate babies have to pass. And Olave, strong enough now, had been a delicate and fretful baby. Besides Agnes adored children and loved fussing over them, and took a keen interest in their dull little ailments. It was only natural, therefore, thought Felicity, that she should have charge of Olave. Children throve far better in the pure Cotswold air than in London or Paris. Lady Trent made in the beginning innumerable and ingenious excuses for leaving Olave at the Manor. But as time went on the arrangement crystallized into such apparent permanence that ex-

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cuses were no longer necessary. Agnes was still, however, capable of experiencing a shock when strangers, unfamiliar with the little history, would speak to her of "your orphan niece."

So far there had been nothing to indicate the approach of any change. Miss Ardern continued to govern the Manor House; to bring up Olave as tenderly, but with just perhaps the slightest additional strictness, as she had in the past brought up Felicity; to visit the poor and sick, and to watch the sunsets. She had no dreams—I think if she had had any she would have regarded them somewhat dubiously—and she was unwishful for any change. She was still so young looking that people sometimes wondered why she was always regarded as an old maid. She left home more seldom than ever, and it almost seemed as if something of the greyness of the austere Cotswold landscape, had passed into her life.

In the absence of Felicity, who came to Nether Cheldon as little as she could, it was only natural that in the course of years Agnes Ardern's thoughts and interests should have gradually centered themselves around Olave Trent. There was no fickleness here, no dispossession of an earlier idol to make room for a newer one. Olave, the daughter, was the natural successor of Felicity, the mother. In watching over the girl with an undiminished tenderness, an unslackened vigilance, Miss Ardern was only fulfilling the lifelong task she had undertaken in regard to Felicity Trent.

The two sisters were so different in outward aspect that few people seeing them for the first time would have imagined them to be any relation to each other. Miss Ardern was of middle height and of somewhat thick build. She had brown hair, very abundant and glossy, which she wore carefully

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parted above a serene unlined forehead. Her eyes were grey and possessed a habitual expression of candid innocence. They were the eyes of a woman whom the uglier things of life have passed by so completely that their existence seems to have remained almost unsuspected. By nature calm and placid, Agnes diffused an atmosphere of ordered serenity. She was almost immeasurably tolerant toward her fellow-creatures and was ever ready to hold out a helping hand to anyone in distress. There was something of motherhood in her very attitude toward people, whether old or young, rich or poor. She was perhaps less old-fashioned than completely unmodern. She had rarely mixed with the world that lay beyond Nether Cheldon, and the convulsive changes that occurred there left her practically untouched except, perhaps, by a profound and passionate pity.

Lady Trent on the other hand was one of those beautiful and attractive women toward whom all men, and most women, display a curious indulgence. She was very dark—brilliantly dark—with a small delicate face lit up by a pair of wonderful eyes that were as nearly black as English eyes ever are. Her features were almost perfectly drawn, and she had a mass of hair of silken darkness. She was taller than her sister and very slenderly built. Now at four or five and thirty she looked almost as young as she had been when, in defiance of her father's warnings and her sister's entreaties, she had become the wife of Digby Trent. Her character had, however, considerably changed since those days. Freed from her sister's influence with all it possessed of the calm, the commonplace and the normal, Felicity had become very modern and even slightly unconventional in her outlook. But, although she had suffered such a complete disillusionment, she was sel-

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dom bitter. She accepted life with a certain philosophic calm that made her seem cold and even heartless. Agnes had hoped that she would make a second and a happier marriage, but so far Felicity had displayed no inclination to make another matrimonial venture.

But from the first days of her widowhood she had absolutely refused to live at the Manor. The cold and bleak climate of the Cotswold had never suited her, she was wont to affirm. She made her home in London, as far as she could be said to have a home at all, for the little house in Waverton Street was more often empty than inhabited. Invariably during the winter she went abroad. She had become brilliant and rather cosmopolitan and was often mistaken for a Frenchwoman. She was rich enough to indulge all her own whims. Once or twice during the year she would run down to the Manor to have a look at Olave, as she expressed it. But it was always Agnes whom she really wished to see.

Olave was in some respects very like her mother. She was, however, stronger and more athletic-looking than Felicity. When one saw them side by side it was easy to distinguish in Olave the salient characteristics of a new and more independent generation possessing a wider and less sentimental outlook upon life. She promised to be extremely pretty. Her eyes and hair were as dark as Lady Trent's, but she had more color and it was probable that she would be taller. She warmly reciprocated her aunt's devotion. Agnes was not for the second time to give all and receive little in return.

The sunset had expired behind the hill that was called Ardern's Knoll from the clump of trees that grew thickly upon its summit and marked the site of an ancient "barrow." For many centuries the Ardern property had extended as far as this spot,

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and the whole of the beautiful Western front of the house commanded a view of that famous landmark. Above it the sky was still bright and luminous with a kind of liquid golden effect, and the ring of trees was silhouetted with a stenciled softness. Outside an owl hooted with a long melancholy cry that startled Agnes as she stood there.

As she turned away, almost reluctantly, from the window a footman entered bringing a telegram on a small silver tray. Miss Ardern opened it and glanced at its contents. Then she turned to the man and said in her quiet even tone:

"There is no answer. Her ladyship is coming down this evening. Tell Green to take the closed motor to the Junction at a quarter past eight—he will have to start at once. Dinner at a quarter to nine."

Having given these orders without evincing any of the surprise she felt at Felicity's sudden message after so long an absence, Agnes Ardern went slowly upstairs. Yes, it was nearly a year since her sister had visited Nether Cheldon, and she had spent the interval almost wholly abroad, traveling with some friends. About a week before she had written from Paris saying that she was on her way home. They had not known of her arrival in England.

"I wonder what she will think of Olave," was Miss Ardern's first consideration as she went into her room to dress for dinner. "She has altered a good deal in the past year. She has grown very much and she looks older."

She rang the bell for her maid and then went down the hall and tapped lightly at a door on the left. It was almost immediately opened by Olave herself.

"Yes, Aunt Agnes?" she said in her clear young voice.

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"Olave, dear," said Miss Ardern, "your mother has just telegraphed to say she is coming down to-night. You had better dress so as to be quite ready when she comes. I have put off dinner. I think you had better wear your new blue dress."

So deep was her proprietary interest in Olave that she was almost painfully anxious she should make a good impression upon her mother. That habit of light sarcastic criticism in which Lady Trent was wont to indulge spared no one, least of all her young daughter.

It was almost dark in Olave's room, and the girl had evidently been reading near the open window. Her book still lay open on the chair. For a few minutes the aunt and niece stood side by side in silence, looking out at the fast-falling shadows. A few clouds, fine as combed hair, were passing slowly across the sky; they looked like white passage birds traveling mysteriously toward some unknown bourne.

"I wonder why she didn't write sooner to say she was coming," said Olave at last.

"Oh, she never cares about writing letters. Besides, I expect it was a sudden decision."

"I don't like surprises," said Olave. "If it's something nice I'd rather have the pleasure of looking forward to it. And if it's something horrid you've got time to screw up your courage to bear it."

With a faint sense of disloyalty Miss Ardern wondered to which category the coming of Felicity would be relegated in the mind of her young daughter.

"I wonder why she doesn't come to live with us," said the girl suddenly, knitting her fine black brows in a delicate frown. "Or at least have me to live with her. People think it's awfully queer of her."

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"My dear Olave—who are people?" inquired Miss Ardern with some severity. For the moment she could hardly believe she had heard Olave's words aright. It was the first time she had ever in her hearing let fall any criticism of her mother.

"Judy Mercer was talking about it only to-day. She said that Mrs. Ogilvy had told Lady Mercer she couldn't understand it at all considering I am her only child. They think it *odd* that I should live here with you instead of with my own mother."

There had been much more said, for Judy Mercer had a precociously sharp little tongue, but Olave thought she had already divulged enough of the conversation to make her point.

"Odd?" repeated Miss Ardern. She flushed a little as if the words had given her a shock. Then she cleared her throat and said, "You see you have always been in my care, Olave. Ever since you were a little baby."

"Yes, I know I have, but that doesn't make it any the less queer. Judy asked me why it was and I couldn't tell her."

"Your mother preferred that it should be so."

It was not a very adequate reason. But then it was utterly impossible for Miss Ardern to utter the truth and say, "She doesn't want you with her because she has never liked you." All of a sudden she felt an immense pity for Olave well up in her heart. It was accompanied by a feeling toward Felicity that she did not stop to analyze. Still she could always find a hundred reasons for forgiving Felicity; the process was indeed fatally easy. She added quietly, "You had better dress now, Olave. Come to my room and let me see you when you are ready."

There was a touch of severity in her voice, as if she wished to show Olave that it was unlawful

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to criticize her mother in this way. But she could not find it in her heart to rebuke her openly. There was a great deal to be said for Olave.

About a quarter of an hour later Olave came down the hall and knocked at her aunt's door. She looked charming in the new blue dress, which was loosely made and cut low at the throat. Her eyes were bright and there was a healthy pink color in her cheeks. She looked excited and a little nervous.

Miss Ardern quietly kissed her. She wished to show that she was not annoyed with her for the little petulant, resentful outburst. The girl returned her embrace, but said nothing.

It was Miss Ardern who broke the silence.

"You look very nice, Olave. I hope your mother will find you have improved."

"She won't care if I have or not!" said Olave, with a careless contempt that astonished her aunt.

Miss Ardern inwardly blamed the Mercers and Mrs. Ogilvy for discussing the situation so unwisely in front of Judy, who was quite certain to repeat all they had said at the first opportunity. The mischief was done, and Olave's eyes had been roughly opened to something unusual and, as she had expressed it, "queer" in her own situation. It was unfortunate, too, that it should have happened just now when Felicity's return was so imminent. Agnes had always imagined that Olave accepted her lot simply and unquestioningly as children normally do. Now it seemed that she was beginning to observe and criticize and to condemn.

Her loyalty to Felicity made Agnes say a trifle sharply:

"I really can't have you speaking like that, Olave. You should not allow people to criticize your mother in front of you. She is perfectly at liberty to make any arrangement she chooses for your education."

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Olave received the rebuke in silence. It was very seldom that Agnes ever spoke so severely to her. She became jealously aware of that almost fierce loyalty, that absolute refusal to criticize or judge Lady Trent, which characterized her aunt. It formed a kind of rocky stratum beneath that calm and gentle and benign disposition.

Olave followed Miss Ardern a little sulkily down the stairs. It was so long since she had seen her mother that she felt nervous at the prospect of the approaching meeting. She trembled too with a kind of anxious excitement that she could not control and for which she despised herself. She did not know if she were glad or sorry that her mother should be coming. But she felt convinced of one thing—that Felicity would almost certainly disturb, and perhaps destroy, the existing harmony. Even in Olave's young judgment Lady Trent's was in upsetting, disquieting presence.

CHAPTER II

LADY TRENT RETURNS TO CHELDON

THE hoot of a motor rang out across the silence. A swift rumbling of wheels coming along the avenue could be heard. Miss Ardern rose and went into the hall, followed by Olave.

Out of the darkness beyond the hall, detaching itself from the shadows, there came a figure, slight, graceful, eager, heavily veiled. The veil was pushed abruptly back, and Lady Trent's face looked out from beneath the brim of a small traveling hat enveloped in a mass of gauzy black material.

"Well, Aggie, darling? Well, Olave?" Her

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voice was singularly attractive with the timbre that has been called golden. "The train was late as usual. I hope you haven't waited dinner for me? What a giantess you are, Olave!"

She looked into her daughter's face as she spoke with a laughing greeting that was full of charm—a charm that one felt it would be impossible to resist—and kissed her lightly. But Miss Ardern, watching them both a trifle nervously, perceived that Olave shrank almost imperceptibly away from both the embrace and the greeting.

She only answered, "Am I?" in a voice that was at once proud and timid.

Even while Miss Ardern hoped that Felicity had not noticed that slight shrinking she knew by experience it was improbable—very little ever escaped her.

As she accompanied her sister upstairs Miss Ardern said,

"You gave me such short notice, darling. I hope you'll find everything all right."

Although the house belonged to them both it always seemed that during Felicity's brief visits she was a guest there.

Olave had remained downstairs, resentment against this beautiful vision who was her mother slowly filling her heart. Always when she came she took complete possession of Aunt Aggie, there seemed no room for Olave then. She watched them going upstairs with darkening eyes.

Miss Ardern opened the door of her sister's room, and switched on the electric light. A small fire was burning on the hearth, for the evenings are nearly always chilly on the Cotswold Hills. The lights, carefully shaded, burned in delicate, old gilt sconces. There were flowers on the tables—roses, lilies of the valley, and carnations, lavishly distributed.

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Lady Trent bestowed upon it all one swift glance, and then, turning, she flung her arms round Agnes' neck, and kissing her, exclaimed,

"You darling! Of course it's all right! It was just like you to remember the flowers. Oh, Aggie, have you missed me? Very much, I mean? I've been simply longing to see you again. Do get rid of Olave as early as possible to-night, and let's have one of our long, long talks. I've got such heaps to tell you—really important things."

Agnes Ardern laughed.

"Very well, dear. I'll pack her off early. We can sit up as late as you like."

Lady Trent took the pins out of her hat and flung it carelessly on the bed. She was even prettier without her hat, for her hair grew low and thick in a point on her brow.

"What a strange girl Olave is," she said. "She didn't look in the least pleased to see me. In fact she seemed decidedly bored." She glanced at her sister with an expression of mockery in her dark shining eyes. "You haven't been able then to imbue her with any of your own enthusiasm for poor Felicity Trent!"

Agnes paused. That half-proud, half-nervous shrinking movement of Olave's had not, as she had hoped, passed unobserved. It had been eloquent of the girl's new attitude toward her mother. She was no longer able to accept the existing condition of things simply, as she had done as a child. She realized that there was something abnormal, as well as unnatural, in the fact that she did not live with her mother, but had from babyhood been consigned to the care of her aunt. All Miss Ardern's kindness could not atone for the anomaly of her position at Nether Cheldon.

"Olave is at an awkward age, Felicity dear," she said at last in her quiet, temperate way.

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"I hope she's not been worrying you? I shall give her a good talking to if she has," said Lady Trent, with a hint of temper in her voice. "I'm not quite prepared to forego all my maternal prerogatives you see, Aggie!"

"Oh, you mustn't scold her," said Agnes hastily; "she has not been worrying me at all. She's a very good child and she has been working well this term. Only one always has to be patient with girls, especially when they are just growing up."

"Ah, you are spoiling her just as you used to spoil me," said Lady Trent in her charming, soft way; "you were always much too patient, Aggie, dear. How late it is! I suppose we ought to go down to dinner. I hope Olave will try to make herself agreeable." She slipped her hand in her sister's arm and moved toward the door. "I'm only staying for a few days this time—I'll tell you why presently. I think Olave has grown very tall; she's quite as tall as I am already, isn't she? I can hardly believe she's my own daughter; she makes me feel horribly old! And really she's quite good-looking. Hortense must do her hair for her; girls of that age aren't wearing it like that now. I like her dress—it's simple and pretty. It is almost time for her to go and finish in Paris."

Thus talking Felicity entered the library a little in advance of her sister. Near the window Olave was sitting reading.

Outside the luminous twilight of June, that is never quite darkness in the North, disclosed the black shadowy trees in the park and the scattered lights of the little village lying in the valley. On the hills beyond a light shone out occasionally to mark the spot of some lonely farm house. Miss Ardern approached the window and stood beside Olave. It seemed to her that many hours must have passed over her head since she had stood there

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that evening to watch the sun setting behind Ardern's Knoll. She felt very slightly perturbed in her mind, as even serene and cloistered souls may feel when their peaceful monotony is suddenly disturbed by active events. But it was not the coming of Lady Trent that had awakened this sense of disturbance in her mind. Her sister's coming invariably gave her the most sincere joy of her life. It colored and warmed it and made it in a sense beautiful and vivid, endowing it, too, with meaning and purpose. Felicity was always charmingly affectionate to her. And how well and lovely she was looking! Agnes had never seen her look quite so brilliant and exquisite before. It was as if some new happiness had come into her life.

But it was Olave herself who was causing Miss Ardern an almost unprecedented distress of mind. She had never seen her in such a strange mood before. Olave was naturally of a sweet disposition, she was simple, affectionate, tractable. What had put it into her mind to adopt this carping attitude—to utter those strange, resentful criticisms of her mother? Why did she question her actions in that half-sullen, half-contemptuous fashion, and, then, on the top of it all, receive her with a coldness that was almost insolent?

Miss Ardern feared a little for Olave. The girl had no idea how forcible her mother could be when she chose. If Olave were to receive that threatened scolding she would emerge from the experience with the definite knowledge that her mother was not a person to whom one could be rude with impunity. The patience of Lady Trent was by no means inexhaustible.

Then the pendulum swung back a little. After all, Olave would only reap the consequences of her conduct, and receive what perhaps a less partial per-

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son than her aunt would admit was only too well deserved. Girls had no right to criticize their parents. Only it was perhaps a little difficult for Olave to regard Felicity in the light of a parent, particularly of a stern one. But she was a woman of the world, and she would naturally wish to enforce that world's standards of good form and manners upon her daughter.

"If I could only have foreseen this new attitude of Olave's!" thought Miss Ardern. But, alas, it had only been revealed at the very moment when Felicity was expected. She had only just had time to realize its existence herself, when the girl had displayed that ill-concealed animosity toward her mother.

It was too late now to warn Olave.

Dinner was quickly over, for Felicity declared herself tired with her journey from Paris and Olave showed little inclination to eat. Lady Trent did most of the talking, relating her adventures during a yachting trip she had made recently in the Mediterranean. She described, with some vivacity, the places she had visited. Olave listened with a dull envy. Why should her mother enjoy this brilliant, exciting life and leave her to the dullness of Nether Cheldon? She hardly ever left home. She had seen nothing of the world. Even Judy had traveled abroad, had been to Paris and Florence, the south of France and Switzerland. But Olave's expression did not betray her. She listened attentively and her silence passed unnoticed.

Afterward they all returned to the library. Agnes took up some knitting; she seldom allowed herself to be idle. Olave looked at some illustrated papers which had just arrived. It was not very long before Miss Ardern said quietly:

"Olave, I think it is your bed-time. We dined

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much later than usual to-night. I hope you have finished your preparation."

"Yes, Aunt Aggie," said Olave.

She rose, put aside the papers, and came across the room. She kissed her mother first and then her aunt. Felicity said carelessly:

"I shall send Hortense to you to-morrow to do your hair for you. You can't wear it like that any more." Her tone was decisive.

"Very well, mother," said Olave.

She went out of the room. Felicity watched her, as she went, with frank, not unfriendly attention.

"She's really very pretty, Aggie. Was I ever as pretty as that? They say girls are nearly always an improvement on their mothers when they take after them. I feel as if Olave were at present a slightly enlarged, exaggerated edition of myself!"

Miss Ardern said quietly:

"You were beautiful, Fay. I don't think Olave will ever be beautiful."

"She has youth on her side now though," said Lady Trent.

"Yes, but there's something lacking. One can't exactly say what it is, for, of course, she is extraordinarily like you. I noticed it more than ever to-night. Olave is extremely pretty—rather distinguished-looking. One can't say more."

"Ah, you are prejudiced, darling," said Lady Trent, stretching out a slim arm and encircling her sister's neck with a caressing gesture. "How faithful you are, Aggie. You've never let Olave take my place with you although you have had charge of her since she was a baby. Why, she is almost like your own child, you must forget sometimes that she belongs to me and not to you."

"Oh, no, I never forget that," said Agnes seriously. "I am perfectly ready to hand her over to you whenever you wish it."

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Felicity took no notice of this statement. She only said:

"I wish she wouldn't scowl like that. She looks so *farouche;* it quite frightens me. I cannot have her disapproving of me, Agnes; no one has ever done that, and coming from my own daughter I should dislike it intensely."

Agnes put down her knitting and looked quite earnestly at her sister.

"If there is anything you don't like you must tell her, Fay. It's only right that you should. But —my dear—I've never blamed you for giving up your only child to the care of others, and I've wondered sometimes if you have ever felt sorry and perhaps blamed yourself. Perhaps you have seen it was wrong—that it was putting the child in a false position? I've done what I could for Olave, but nothing can ever really make up for a mother's love. If the mother dies, of course, it is very sad—one of the saddest things—but one knows that it is the will of God. But for a woman to give up her child wilfully and deliberately and deprive it of its natural rights—its heritage of love and care—*that* seems a cruelty which is unnecessary and dreadful."

While Agnes Ardern was uttering these unusually passionate words Felicity Trent did not once take her eyes off her sister's face. To say that she was astonished at this unexpected speech, which, somehow, seemed to reflect upon her own conduct in a very pointed way, would be to describe the situation altogether too mildly. She turned very white, and her dark eyes held an expression of pathetic reproach, such as one sees sometimes in the face of a child who has received an unmerited reproof.

"Oh, Aggie—and I thought you were glad to have her! I hoped that in time she would even come to take my place in your life. I *never* thought you

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would blame me. I meant to give you a pleasure, not a burden."

"You know that Olave has never been a burden. I've loved having her, and I don't know what I should have done without her. But it seems to me that I've no right to have my life filled by Olave in this way. I wasn't thinking of myself at all. I was thinking of you and Olave—a mother and daughter and yet such strangers to each other! Scarcely a word to say to one another although you have not met for nearly a year. It never struck me so forcibly as it did to-night. But you mustn't blame Olave for what is really your own fault, Fay. You have deprived her of her mother for sixteen years. All that time she's been without a mother's love. Nothing can ever make up to her, or to you, for that. Oh, I know at first there were excuses, you were very young, you had passed through a time of great misery. But now—" she stopped, and again Felicity's arm was flung caressingly round her neck.

"You dear old darling, you mustn't be tragic about it! Console yourself with the reflection that Olave would probably not have survived my tender mercies. I never had the slightest idea how to bring up a child, and I have never liked girls. If she had been a boy I should have interested myself much more. One does in a boy, you know. You really mustn't be so sentimental about it. I knew that Olave would be perfectly happy in your hands, much safer and happier than she would have been in mine. You've had her all these years—sixteen, isn't it? How time flies, and now I'm afraid you'll have to go on having her! I shall want her less than ever in the future, Aggie, as I'm—I'm coming to my great news now—I'm thinking of getting married again!"

As she made this surprising statement Felicity

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Trent looked more beautiful than ever. Her face softened and her dark eyes held a peculiar and luminous radiance. For a moment Agnes sat in silence looking at her, speechless and amazed, wondering, too, who this man could be who had at last awakened for the second time the love of Lady Trent.

Fourteen or fifteen years ago she would not have been in the least astonished at such an announcement, it would only have been exactly what she and all the rest of their little world had confidently expected. Felicity as a widow of twenty, released from a most undesirable husband and with her wealth and dazzling loveliness, seemed hardly the woman to remain long unwed. But she had resolutely refused all her many offers. Her brief experience had been altogether too bitter, and she was not a woman to fall in love easily. She enjoyed her freedom; she spent her money freely; she came and went as she would. The restless rather aimless life she led had grown upon her. And now after fifteen years she was calmly announcing her approaching marriage.

"Don't look so startled, Aggie," she said with a light laugh that was not wholly free from embarrassment. "I'm not actually engaged yet, I have made no promises. But I am very seriously thinking about it. So you see there is less chance than ever of my depriving you of Olave, as you seemed just now to wish."

"I feel as if it couldn't be true," said Agnes at last.

"Truth is falser than fiction, I know," said Felicity coolly; "but in this case she speaks truly. I am not only thinking of getting married but to tell you a profound secret I have actually fallen in love, just like a silly schoolgirl in fact. Mercifully he does not know it. At my age one keeps one's head!

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Just at the moment he is waiting for my answer, which I didn't, of course, want to give until I had seen you and discussed the whole thing with you."

"It is not Alick Clibborn?" said Agnes, mentioning the name of the most stubbornly faithful of Felicity's many admirers.

"Dear old Alick; no, of course, it isn't!" replied Lady Trent. "We shouldn't have needed to discuss it as I know you would have been only too delighted!"

"When did all this happen?" inquired Miss Ardern. She had not yet recovered from her surprise, and an odd sense of misgiving crept into her heart, as if she feared that her sister were about to take an unwise step for the second time. She still wished to shield and protect her as she had done when she was a child.

"He was with the Baxters' on their yacht," said Felicity. "We were thrown a good deal together —Nina Baxter is such a wretched sailor—she says she only had four meals the whole time. However, no one guessed anything. I was frightfully careful; I do so dislike any premature discussion of these things. On his side it began very soon, and I always liked him although it didn't enter my head for ages that he wanted to marry me. He really only asked me to be his wife last week when we met again in town. He wrote saying that he would like to come and call, and I knew if I let him that it would be all over with me. I did hesitate, Agnes, before giving him permission to come. I had been free for so long, and I was not sure that I wished to settle down and give up my roving life."

"And then he came?" said Agnes.

"Yes, he came and spoke to me almost before he had got into the room. It did rather take me aback, and I haven't given him an answer yet. I sent him away. I wasn't sure."

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"You haven't told me who he is," said Agnes, her misgivings growing slowly more pronounced.

"His name is Guy Quinn," said Felicity.

She lingered a little over it as if she were in the habit of pronouncing it sometimes secretly to herself.

"Quinn! The author?" Miss Ardern's face fell a little. Her expression changed and grew slightly harder.

"Yes, the author," said the unconscious Felicity; "he is as charming as his books. I have read them all—you know he is one of the people I always read." There was a little challenge in her manner as if she had suddenly become aware of Agnes' unfavorable attitude.

"I do not like his books at all," said Miss Ardern. "I have given up asking for them at the library."

"You dear old prude, of course you don't like them. But I do immensely; he describes just the kind of life, just the sort of people, I know and am accustomed to." She was a little irritated by the uncompromising reference to Quinn's work.

"I have had this feeling about him, that he could never have known a really nice woman. All his women are horrid."

"Well, I am vain enough to think he knows one now and likes her well enough to wish to marry her," said Felicity. "But you must lecture him about his shortcomings when you get to know him, Aggie. Only don't lecture me, there's a darling. I'm too happy to-night, even my daughter failed to ruffle me!"

"I found Olave reading one of his books once. I took it away from her."

"You did quite right—she is far too young to read novels. I should have done the same my-

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self if I had caught her," said Lady Trent. "The less a girl thinks about love and marriage at that age the better. I only wish I had never thought about them when I was Olave's age. It would have saved me from so much misery. But to go back to Guy; he's really perfectly charming, Aggie, and you must like him for my sake."

"How old is he?" inquired Agnes. "I thought he was quite young. He is always spoken of as one of the younger men."

"He is a year younger than I am," said Felicity. "You would not call that old, I suppose?"

But she made the admission with a touch of reluctance. She was aware that when they stood side by side Quinn looked the younger of the two.

"Is he well off?" inquired Miss Ardern.

"He makes a lot by his books now, but when he started he was quite poor. But that doesn't matter; I have such heaps," said Lady Trent with a sigh.

"Then why do you hesitate?" said Agnes. "You seem to have made up your mind. Why don't you tell him so?"

"I'm coming to that," said Felicity; "there is a hitch—there always is when it comes to a question of marriage. Neither of us has any parents so no one can make any objection except yourself, darling, and you know I shouldn't listen to you for I'm quite certain that if I do marry Guy I shall be the happiest woman in the world."

Agnes remembered hearing something of the kind seventeen or eighteen years ago when the prospect of a marriage with Sir Digby Trent was being discussed. However, she did not refer to the point.

"Well, what is this hitch, dear?" she asked, smiling affectionately at her sister.

"He is a Roman Catholic," said Felicity, "at least

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he was brought up in that faith. From what I can gather he isn't a very good one. I doubt if he bothers his head about it one way or the other. All the same he has an old sister who is a nun and, whom he doesn't want to shock, so he says we must be married in a Catholic church. I have been making inquiries, Agnes—you know Violet Corby married a Catholic and she told me she had to promise that all the children should be brought up as Catholics. I'm trying to get used to the idea. It'll be hard on me as I have the money, and if there are ever any children I could afford to send them to whatever schools I choose; so I do not at all see why I should sign away all my rights in this way, especially for a man who is really quite indifferent."

Miss Ardern was silent. She was deeply attached to her own church, and, although she was aware that Felicity had never shared her enthusiasm, she resented the thought that her possible children would have to be brought up in another religion.

"It seems to me a very grave objection to your marrying him," she said at last. "And I do not think a careless Catholic can make a very desirable husband. Are you sure you care for him, Felicity? Enough I mean? It's not because you are suddenly tired of your loneliness, of your aimless life?"

"I am not at all tired of my liberty, if you mean that," said Lady Trent with decision. "If I marry Guy it will be for the simple and sufficient reason that I love him."

"Where is he now?"

"I left him in London but he means to go down to the country somewhere to finish his book. It's nearly done, he says. You see I asked him not to write to me again until I had given him my answer."

"Well, my dear, I hope you will be very happy.

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Make quite sure first, though, that you have counted the cost, that you think it worth while. When it is quite settled I hope you will ask him to stay here." She gave the invitation with a touch of reluctance.

"Later on, perhaps," said Lady Trent; "but at present I don't wish Olave to know. It seems almost absurd for a woman to be engaged when she has a daughter as tall as herself. And I don't want to frighten poor Guy out of his wits by presenting him to a huge, grown-up, scowling, future stepdaughter! I must break him into the idea by degrees. He isn't at all accustomed to think of me as a person weighted with such an encumbrance. I hardly realized myself until to-night that she was so tall and old-looking. I always call her my little girl if I speak of her at all which is not very often; you know I have never been at all sentimental about her! Guy is aware of her existence and that's about all. I have never mentioned Digby to him. But there's plenty of time to introduce him to everything, including all the skeletons in the cupboard!"

"When do you think of getting married?" asked Agnes. She was accustomed to her sister's flippancy, and, when less important issues were at stake, it amused her.

"If I accept him—which I shall almost certainly do—I do not see why there should be any delay," said Felicity. "This is June, so probably it will be not later than August. Do you think you could send Olave to the seashore in about a fortnight with Mademoiselle? I could bring him down then, and you could see him and talk over things a little."

"Perhaps that would be best. I shouldn't like to send her away now, just as you have come back. She might suspect—"

"About Guy? Oh, I don't think so. She must have relinquished the idea of having a stepfather by this time."

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"I wasn't thinking of Mr. Quinn. I was only thinking that it might occur to her—"

She paused watching Felicity's face.

"Well, what is it, Aggie, dear?"

"That you didn't want her," replied Agnes slowly.

"Olave's not a fool; she must have guessed that long ago. She must know by this time that girls generally live with their mothers."

Agnes caught her breath. Yes, Olave had at last awakened to the bitter knowledge that there was something strange and "queer" in the fact that she had no place in her mother's life.

"There will be, as I said, less place for Olave than ever in the future," continued Lady Trent.

"And I had always hoped that when you got tired of your restless life you would come back to me—and Olave. I had quite made up my mind that you would never marry again," said Agnes.

"I should never have been happy at Cheldon in any case," said Lady Trent. "I must have movement and excitement; there is nothing to do here from morning till night. I think it's wonderful of Olave to bear it in the way she does. Those bleak grey hills make me want to scream when I've looked at them for about a week. And the cold winds— No, Aggie, it would be impossible and fortunately Guy is of the same opinion. We shall make our home in Waverton Street and spend the winter abroad. He likes London as much as I do. He says he does all his best work there."

"I wish you would wait a little before you marry, Fay," said Agnes; "after all, you can only know him very slightly and it seems such a risk. Especially, as you will have, perhaps, to make such sacrifices in the future."

"Now, Aggie, don't begin about imprudence. All marriages are dreadfully imprudent. But I like Guy and he is, I am sure, very much in love with me.

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By the way, he thinks you are a perfect brick to have looked after Olave all these years, though he doesn't realize how many. He's very sympathetic about Olave."

"Sympathetic?" Miss Ardern frowned.

"I mean he sees that a child would have been very much in my way. I told him there were no Trents who could take her, at least none who were sufficiently respectable. So I had to dump her down at Cheldon and at Cheldon she must certainly remain."

"Don't, Fay," pleaded Agnes.

"Don't what? What do you mean, Aggie?"

"I don't like to hear you talk about your own child like that," said Agnes in a tone of gentle, almost hesitating, reproof.

"Mercifully, darling, I need never pretend when I'm with you. You know I don't care about Olave and she doesn't care about me, though I intend to let her know that she is not to show it before I have done with her! She reminds me of something I want to forget—something I would much rather never think about. Doesn't it seem curious, Aggie, that a stranger like Guy may just walk into one's life without any warning and before one can realize it one has promised to marry him?"

She was suddenly serious. Agnes stroked back the dark hair, smooth as fine black silk.

"I wish you would try to win Olave's affection," said Miss Ardern. "I find her so lovable, so affectionate; such a dear child."

Felicity shook her head.

"Pas la peine," she affirmed.

"I wonder if Guy will think her pretty?"

"Most men do," said Agnes.

"I shouldn't like that; I might be jealous of Olave," said Lady Trent reflectively. "A man of Guy's age ought really to marry a young girl."

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"But if he loves you, Fay?"

"Oh, yes, he loves me now. But he loved me very quickly, very easily. That isn't the kind of love that always lasts longest."

There was never any bitterness about Felicity's lack of illusions; with her it had the simplicity of a long-accepted fact.

"Oh, my dear Felicity, do please be careful. You made one mistake and it has injured your whole life. And it seems such a risk."

"Of course it is a risk," said Lady Trent irritably. "Guy is very good-looking, he has the artistic temperament, and, as you say, I know him very little. Also he is a Catholic, though not a practising one. But I am sure he loves me and I mean to marry him. I was really only joking about Olave. He will be horrified at her size, and perhaps he will begin to think I'm older than I say I am! It is getting late and I suppose we ought to go to bed."

She lifted up her hand, drew her sister's face down close to hers, and kissed her with a tenderness that Agnes found enchanting.

"Dear old Aggie," she murmured in her caressing way.

Miss Ardern rose. She put away her knitting in a dark blue bag that Olave had made for her last Christmas, switched off the light as became a careful householder, and followed her sister into the hall and up the wide flight of polished, shallow, oaken stairs. Near her own door she paused hesitatingly.

"What are you waiting for?" said Lady Trent.

"This is Olave's room now. I am going in to say good-night to her."

"Oh, won't she be asleep?" said Felicity.

"I don't think so. She generally stays awake until I come up. Will—will you come in with me, Fay?"

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Lady Trent shook her head.

"No, thank you, Aggie. I don't think I can begin to feel motherly toward Olave to-night. I am too tired and besides I don't think she deserves it." She kissed her sister again and moved in the direction of her room. "There I've shocked you again, darling, but never mind!"

And she slipped noiselessly down the hall, a slim, graceful figure, her little head thrown back.

CHAPTER III

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

AGNES opened the door of Olave's room, very softly so as not to awaken the girl if she had by any chance fallen asleep. Not that she expected to find her asleep, although the hour was later than usual; she had been sitting up so long talking to Felicity. But Olave had looked flushed and nervous and excited when she went up to bed, almost as if she had been disturbed and distressed by her mother's coming.

Well, the proposed marriage would make very little difference to her. It would only crystallize her position at Nether Cheldon. It was quite evident that neither Felicity nor Guy would wish for her presence with them.

Olave was sitting up in bed reading. She was propped up by pillows. On a table near her bedside stood a lamp. Her cheeks were still flushed; her large dark eyes were heavy with sleep. When Agnes kissed her she found that her face was wet. She had been crying.

"Reading, Olave? You know that is forbidden after ten o'clock."

"Yes, but to-night I couldn't lie still. I kept

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waiting and waiting for you to come up. Sit down, *dear* Aunt Aggie."

Miss Ardern sat down on the edge of the bed and Olave flung impetuously an arm about her.

"She didn't want to see me a bit. She only came to see you—she only cares for you. And to-morrow I suppose she'll be flying off again as if neither of us existed."

Miss Ardern stroked the girl's hair with a soft caressing touch. Perhaps she had anticipated something of the kind for throughout dinner, in spite of her silence, Olave had evinced signs of being excited and upset. She was highly strung; she had her mother's temperament without possessing anything of the philosophy that gave such coldness and calm to the present-day Felicity. But, then, Lady Trent had learned her philosophy in a severe and bitter school.

"Hush, dear," said Agnes gently; "don't think hard thoughts of your mother. You weren't very nice to her yourself, were you?"

"How could I be? I always feel as if she were laughing at me, mocking me. She makes me feel awkward, horribly awkward and ugly. She is lovely, isn't she?"

"Yes, she is very beautiful," said Miss Ardern, "but you ought to be proud of your mother just for that reason, Olave."

"Oh, I would love her if she'd let me! I am ready to love her. But she doesn't care for me, she doesn't want me. Why didn't she come in with you now to kiss me good-night? I heard you talking outside. She must have known you were coming to see me."

Miss Ardern was silent. The rift on both sides was wider and deeper than she had imagined.

"I hope she'll go away from Cheldon soon, very

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soon. We are much happier without her, aren't we? She makes me feel restless, dissatisfied, as if I wanted to go away too—"

"I am not happier without her," said Agnes loyally. "I love your mother very much, Olave. I should like her to be always here with us."

"Oh, it's easy for you, of course," said Olave. "She does care for you, anyone can see that. But I am her own daughter, and she treats me as if I were an ugly, strange little girl!"

"Now, Olave, you are talking wildly and uncharitably. Go to sleep, my dear, and don't read any more to-night. No, I can't stay any longer, it's much too late."

She bent down and kissed the girl several times, with, perhaps, a little added tenderness because it was easy to see that she felt hurt and wounded. Olave clung to her, sobbing a little. It was unlike her to be so emotional and to give way to tears, and Agnes was disturbed in her mind about her. She felt, indeed, very sorry for her, sorry too for the whole sequence of events that had led up to this evening's unpleasantness. Judy Mercer had sown the little poisonous seed and had opened Olave's eyes to the ambiguity of her position as the only child of a woman who took but scant notice of her. And Miss Ardern could not hide from herself that Felicity was deeply to blame. It was impossible to exonerate her, although one could make excuses. She had neglected Olave from the day of her birth; her indifference to her had now almost deepened into dislike. She regarded her daughter as an encumbrance. To the man she was going to marry she had spoken as little as possible of the offspring of her first unhappy marriage. And in her plans for the future Olave played no part at all. There would be a still more complete separation between

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them. There would, perhaps, indeed be other children, to whom Felicity might even prove the most adoring of mothers. Agnes was quite prepared to see some development of the kind, for Felicity was always changing.

Miss Ardern wondered whether Guy Quinn had any exact knowledge of Lady Trent's real attitude toward her daughter. It was one that might conceivably shock a man and even produce a slight sense of disillusionment. But then he would have to learn also how deeply the iron had entered into Felicity's soul. And, if he loved her he would surely understand and forgive her.

When Miss Ardern remembered Digby Trent she felt that she could forgive her sister anything and everything. And, indeed, it was always easy for her to make excuses for Felicity. Had she not been doing so now for the last thirty-four years?

Felicity took her daughter by surprise on the following morning by marching into the schoolroom just after lessons had begun. She kissed Olave, and spoke a few words to Mademoiselle, who had never seen her before and appreciated her charm and beauty allied to what was most obviously a Parisian elegance of attire.

"I want to see Olave alone," said Lady Trent, after exchanging a few polite words with Mademoiselle in the most perfect French. "I am sure you will not mind leaving us for a few minutes."

Mademoiselle withdrew, and Olave feeling a little alarmed stood before her mother moving her hands nervously, and looking almost as awkward as she felt.

"Sit down, Olave, and don't fidget," said Lady Trent. "I only want to tell you that I can't really have you behaving to me as you did last night. It's quite unheard of, and you must remember that it's

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absolutely necessary to look pleased when you are greeting a guest or anyone else. You were terribly ill-bred and it would be wrong of me not to tell you so."

Lady Trent's dark eyes flashed as she spoke.

"Do you quite understand, Olave?"

"Yes, mother," said Olave.

She trembled a little, but she found her mother at that moment more fascinating than she had ever done before.

"You are very nearly grown up and must not behave like an ill-conditioned little girl. I am afraid that Agnes spoils you."

Olave was silent. She was ashamed of herself, and her mother's words aroused the feeling within her that she had been foolish in allowing herself to be so strongly influenced by Judy Mercer's words. "Do not please blame Aunt Aggie," she said suddenly; "it has nothing to do with her. I am sorry I am not more like what you wish your daughter to be." Her eyes met her mother's squarely.

Felicity was appeased by both words and look. It came into her mind then that Olave was certainly extremely pretty and also very intelligent-looking. If she had not been going to be married again herself she might have contemplated the feasibility of taking her abroad next winter. She had an idea that she might prove rather a success.

"I hope you are working hard and making the most of your time," she said glancing round the schoolroom. "Girls are expected to know so much in these days. I want you to speak French fluently and you ought to study Italian."

"I have begun it," said Olave, "and I can speak French but not as you do."

Lady Trent was pleased with the implied compliment.

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"Of course, I shall send you to Paris later on," she said.

Perhaps she had been wrong to leave the question of Olave's education so completely to Agnes who had no notion of the modern world. She remembered her own lessons—learned for the most part in this very room not twenty years ago. But things had altered in twenty years and she hoped that Olave was having a better equipment than that. Felicity was bitterly aware that all her real lessons had been learned after her school-days were over and done.

Lady Trent rose. She had finished what she had to say and she was thankful that Olave had taken it in a conciliatory spirit.

"I shall not be here very long," she said gracefully. "I am going to try to persuade Agnes to go with me to Devonshire for a little. She does not go away half often enough."

Olave wondered if she would also be included in the invitation but her mother's next words dispelled this too flattering hope.

"You will be quite occupied here, you will hardly miss us at all."

"Shall you come back here afterward?" said Olave.

"I never know what I am going to do," said Felicity coolly.

She gave Olave a long close scrutiny. What would Guy think of this tall, handsome, almost grown-up girl? He would certainly think her very pretty, and she could be charming if she chose.

"Later on, perhaps, I shall send you to the seashore with Mademoiselle," added Lady Trent. She wanted Olave to feel quite distinctly that she had the right to order her goings and comings, and to exact from her both obedience and respect.

"Aunt Agnes never sends me to the seashore in

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term-time," said Olave, thrilled, and yet resentful, as she listened to the new voice of authority.

"But when I am here you will go exactly when I choose," said Lady Trent.

Olave felt snubbed. She watched her mother as she went out of the room. "She's going away now with Aunt Aggie, and when they come back I suppose I shall be sent to the seashore. She doesn't want me at all, and she won't let me see Aunt Aggie either," thought Olave.

But she had never before felt so keenly sensible of her mother's charm. If Felicity had taken the least trouble she could have made Olave her slave.

Lady Trent was, however, thinking much less of Olave than of Guy Quinn and of all the pros and cons relating to the proposed marriage. Two days later she carried out her plan of departing to Devonshire with Agnes Ardern. There was a little place on the moors where they used to stay together as girls. Felicity had an odd fancy for returning thither now, and Agnes understood that in this brief space of silence and solitude she intended to make up her mind definitely as to whether she was prepared to surrender into Guy Quinn's keeping the freedom that was so dear to her and face the sacrifices which a marriage with him would entail.

CHAPTER IV

PRIMAVERA

"THANK Heaven, I've found a quiet spot away from that crowd of noisy girls! The garden's simply overflowing with them and their dogs, and I don't see the use of asking a poor devil of an author down for a few days' rest and then condemn him to take refuge in a small bedroom fac-

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ing north and as cold as January. Why, *why* does the bachelors' wing always look north? Insoluble problem!"

Thus soliloquizing a young man pushed aside the bushes and made his way through the emerald spikes and knots of newly-opened bracken into a little wood perched high on a hill, and commanding, from its outskirts, a fair and wonderful view of the famous valley of the Chell. He paused for a moment to look at it before penetrating into the little copse which offered such a desirable refuge this June morning. Down in the valley—sheltered and secretive as are all the Cotswold valleys—he could see the clustered grey cottages of Nether Cheldon with their little gables and dormer-windows, built of the hard Cotswold stone. Glimpses of the thin silver line of the Chell showed themselves at intervals where the woods gave place to fields, its course traced by the twin rows of pollard willows that bordered it. The grey tower of an ancient Norman church stood out palely against the background of thick-growing elms, and seemed to preside in a protective manner over the village. A substantial-looking Elizabethan manor-house commanded the high ground to the east of Nether Cheldon, standing on the abrupt spur of a hill which lent itself so easily to the formation of a very perfect-terraced garden of which he could only catch a tantalizing glimpse.

The undulating park-land around it was well wooded, and the house had the indefinable air of being a comfortable, opulent abode, although it lacked the more modern magnificence of Cheldon Park which lay two or three miles away to the south.

The spot he had chosen after the above semi-aggrieved fashion—since much more than the group

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of noisy Mercer children was disturbing the equilibrium of his thoughts to-day—was certainly a very desirable one from the point of view of absolute quiet and solitude. Beech-trees offered a welcome shade from the June sunshine, and his walk up the steep hill had sufficiently counteracted the chilliness produced by the north bedroom. A pleasant light breeze was blowing, rather like wine in its bracing, invigorating effect; it held a fine dry quality that was both fresh and pure. It was austere, too, as that range of wolds opposite was austere to his mind, as he looked out upon those wide green wind-swept spaces, broken only by the low stone walls that divided them with a fascinating irregularity. Not a hedge, scarcely a tree was to be seen when one's eyes had once traveled above the charmingly-wooded, snug little valley. But the clouds, moving like a flock of stately wild whitebirds across the pale blue lake of the sky, made wonderful patterns of softly-moving shadow upon those outspread downs.

He entered the wood, and a fallen tree-trunk lying in a little open grassy space provided him with a seat. He sat down, took out a fountain pen and a writing-block of small size, and began to write. The pen was one of the kind with which he was supplied regularly by a firm of manufacturers in return for a testimonial he had sent them in earlier days, announcing that his novel—the first of a series of brilliant successes—entitled *An Idol of Earth* had been written from the first word to the last with one of the pens in question.

Soon the author, after the manner of his kind, was lost to the world in a world of his own creating, peopled by substantial figures who moved and spoke and acted without much reference, it must be acknowledged, to himself who was their supposititious lord and master. They even possessed, as it seemed

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sometimes fantastically to him, wills and brains and hearts of their own, so that he did not feel like their master but more, as it were, a silent, rather unprejudiced, spectator of the drama they unfolded before his attentive and often admiring eyes. He could feel grateful to them for their candor, their frank exposure to himself of their thoughts and motives—often rigorously concealed from their fellow actors—their little meannesses, their tendency to intrigue, their occasionally astonishing heroism. In return he accorded them a certain detached tolerance. Their witticisms evoked his mirth—he thought their sense of humor greater than his own—their actions, noble or ignoble as the case might be, offered him perpetual and varied themes for that intimate psychological analysis in which his soul delighted, meet subjects also for the fine and delicate writings for which he was now sufficiently famous.

Guy Quinn at thirty-three was a fortunate and much envied man. He had served but a brief space of apprenticeship in the world of letters before he had hit the public fancy with his *Idol of Earth*. From that moment his name had been established, and as he had only then just left Oxford he had suffered no tedious years of waiting such as fall to the lot of many. Now eleven years later his books attained to as many editions as the most rapacious publisher could desire. But he worked very hard. He was methodical and regular in his output. He was never slovenly or careless, and his wealth gave him the entrance into precisely that world which he preferred, and liked also to portray.

He had spent the preceding winter in Egypt. That land of sun and sands, invaded by a brilliant and cosmopolitan throng, had proved a fertile source of inspiration to him and he had there planned the book which he was now finishing at Cheldon.

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On his way home he had been persuaded to join some friends at Naples and accompany them for a few weeks on a yachting expedition in the Mediterranean. It was an invitation he could not resist. And on board the yacht belonging to one Baxter, a South African millionaire, he had met Lady Trent.

Felicity had spoken the truth when she had told Agnes Ardern that Guy had fallen in love with her very quickly. He liked the society of pretty, charming, intelligent women, and he studied them carefully and on the whole tolerantly and charitably. Lady Trent had had from the first a singular attraction for him. He thought that in all his life he had never met such a beautiful woman who was so completely disillusioned. Allied with such charm and loveliness it attracted him profoundly. There was something curiously simple about her, too. He was very quickly at her feet. He did not know anything of her previous history, nor could their mutual acquaintances, the Baxters, offer him much information on the point beyond the fact that her husband, "rather a bad lot," had been dead for some years. He knew nothing then of her wealth although he imagined that she must be well off. From her careless manner of speaking of her daughter he had pictured her as quite a little girl, probably in socks and pinafores in the nursery. Felicity looked younger than she was. To Guy's partial and enamored eyes she looked about twenty-five.

It had all been very wonderful, and though these last weeks of separation and enforced silence had been a little trying to a young man, who was really very much in love, and had even removed something of the great glamour cast upon the world in general by her actual living presence, he was still deeply under the spell of the adventure. And for the first time, perhaps, his work had been definitely and

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seriously interrupted by a love-affair. He could not write. London had become unbearable to him when Felicity took herself off to some unnamed bourne forbidding any correspondence. He found himself constantly nervous, irritable, pre-occupied. After all, why had he suddenly made things difficult for her by telling her that as a Catholic he would have to be married in a Catholic church? He had surrendered to a quite sudden impulse, believing that Felicity would prove perfectly indifferent on the point. When he reflected upon the little scene, enacted in her charming drawing-room in Waverton Street that possessed an austere simplicity he was driven to associate with her for the first time, he remembered how quickly her face had changed, had become grave and serious. He was angry with himself first for having felt the little scruple and then for informing her of it. He wasn't at all a good Catholic, he had hastened to explain, she would find no trace of bigotry nor of *intransigeance* in him, but there were certain things he couldn't quite do, and, of course, she would understand. She did not, however, understand so immediately as he had confidently expected, that is in the sense he intended. There was something in her expression as she looked at him which utterly prevented him from saying as he had meant to do: "You see, though I am careless and indifferent it's a religion you can't easily shake yourself free from! It's got a knack of cropping up at unexpected moments." He knew even when he spoke to her that he could not entertain the idea of being married in any other Church. That would be too drastic a burning of boats, affecting, too, other lives. It did occur to him to wonder whether this sense of impossibility reflected in any way upon his love for Felicity which she was continually subjecting to a close particular analysis. He

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decided that it didn't, that however deep and ardent his love had been it could never overcome the little scruple that had sprung up now to confront him after years of fine indifference.

He fully believed that but for that Lady Trent would have given him an answer then and there, and although he was not vain he had a pretty strong conviction that it would have been a favorable one. It had been his own fault that he had been condemned to spend these weary days of waiting and incertitude. He was horrified at the effect it had had upon his work. When he tried to watch those creations of his brain he found that they had become stiff puppets with lifeless mechanical movements, uttering only the most banal platitudes. Had inspiration failed—failed after eleven comfortable years of plenty? The gods, it has been said, do not give with both hands. In offering him a new gift—the greatest and most precious perhaps of all human possessions—had they with grim delight taken from him his power to create? The book planned and partly written in Egypt, and which had seemed so full of promise, disgusted him. He began to tell himself brutally that he had written himself out, had taken, as Thackeray said, too many crops out of his brain. A woman's face almost eerily beautiful came persistently between himself and his writing-block, banishing with abrupt discourtesy the men and women whose actions and words should have filled it. In despair he had accepted the invitation of Lady Mercer, a sympathetic but rather recent friend, to spend a few quiet days with her at her place on the Cotswolds. He was perfectly ignorant, it must be said, that Felicity's sister and daughter lived in the neighborhood, for Lady Trent by neglect rather than by intention had never mentioned Nether Cheldon to him. The Mercers were comparatively

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speaking newcomers to the neighborhood and this was the first time he had stayed with them.

There was something in the detached quiet of Ardern's Knoll that morning which did materially help him to concentrate his mind upon the work in hand. There were still half a dozen chapters to be written, and the rather elaborate typewritten synopsis of them lay in front of him attached to the block. Delusive thing! How often did his characters sturdily refuse to follow the line of conduct thus clearly indicated to them! They were no meek slaves to be driven down a set path with a whip to enforce submission. Not that Guy objected to manifestations of self-will and rebellion on the part of his puppets as long as they would only condescend to evince signs of life at all, and not merely move across the stage like a group of mechanical marionettes. It was only then that he felt as if he hated both them and his work!

To-day for a wonder the impulse to create had returned and he wrote rapidly, becoming so absorbed in the task that he was utterly oblivious of the passing of time. He felt excited and elated, like a man under the influence of a peculiar drug; he had the rare and delicious sensation that he was at his best. It would after all be a book worthy to lay at Felicity's feet when her reply, so long delayed, should reach him. Yes, it was the delay, the suspense, that had been disturbing him, hindering and fettering him in his work. Yet the fortnight, for which she had bargained, still wanted three days to run.

A slight movement, such as a small wild animal might have made, caused him to start and look up. It had been more of a stirring than an actual sound, a delicate parting of bushes and bracken.

Framed in the arch of fresh, vivid young green

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just in front of him he saw a young girl dressed in white. His thoughts at that moment had been reverting to Felicity, and for a brief second this apparition seemed to possess her very features, as if his own passionate longing had caused her to materialize and appear before him in objective and veridical guise by some unexplained process of thought-transference. But ghosts are not for the noon-day and the June sunshine. A second glance assured him that this was not Felicity, and the resemblance seemed all at once to vanish utterly.

The unconscious effect of that whiteness of her garments as she stood there in her green frame was delicious, and it appealed very swiftly to the artist in Guy. He sought beauty as the painter seeks it, in order to capture something of its transient evanescent quality for an expression that shall endeavor to make it permanent, to arrest it, as it were, and imprison it so that others may behold and wonder. Quinn put down his pen and stared at her, not rudely, but as a man may gaze unrebuked upon a beautiful picture. Green and white—the very livery of spring! And surely no spring blossom was ever more lovely than this girl child, this spirit of the June woods.

Then he raised his hat, and smiled in the confident friendly way that made him so infinitely and perilously attractive to women old and young.

"I'm so sorry, I'm afraid I have disturbed you," she said flushing a little; "but you see I had no idea anyone was here. It's the first time I've ever found anyone here," she added by way of explanation.

It was the attitude of a child who apologizes for interrupting, although unintentionally, her elders.

It piqued Guy a little; he did not care to be regarded in the light of an elderly person to whom a special solicitude and deference must be accorded by charming young girls.

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"But perhaps I am the trespasser," he remarked, and now he put aside the pen and writing-block and rising came a step or two toward her.

He had a very agreeable soft voice, not entirely free perhaps from the Oxford manner.

"It is our wood of course," said the girl simply.

"Is it? Then you see I must be the one to apologize. But you must forgive me, please! I've escaped from the Mercers because I wanted to find a quiet place to work in. This seemed such a peaceful, uninhabited spot."

A slow smile lit up her face. He watched it grow, fascinated. It illuminated the eyes first, then the parted scarlet lips.

"I quite understand you couldn't do any work at the Park!" she declared.

"Ah, I see you know the Mercers, then," he observed.

"Ever since they came here. They're almost our nearest neighbors."

She moved now as if she were about to go. Quinn stopped her with a gesture.

"Please don't go, Miss Primavera," he said. He pointed to the fallen tree-trunk as if offering her a seat.

"Do please sit down and talk to me a little. I've been working for two solid mortal hours and I do so want a little relaxation!"

But Miss Primavera was evidently of a practical nature.

"Haven't you had lunch?" she inquired. "It is nearly two o'clock you know, and the Mercers always lunch at one on account of the children."

"No, I'm afraid I forgot." He looked at his watch. "By jove, you're right and I've been here three hours instead of two! Two o'clock! So it is, but it's their own fault, they simply would overflow the garden."

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The girl laughed. From a string bag slung on her arm she drew forth a small paper parcel.

"You can have the remains of mine if you like," she said sitting down on the ancient tree-trunk, victim perhaps of some long-forgotten storm. "I have been having a picnic all to myself to-day, and I'm afraid I've eaten the best part of it." With her slim browned hands she untied the string, and Guy hungrily watched the sandwiches and cake she proceeded to reveal. "I did them up again because Aunt Aggie does not like me to leave paper about. She is away for a while—with my mother—and Mademoiselle has gone into Cheltenham for the day. So I told the cook to have some lunch ready for me to take into the woods. It's so much nicer you know than eating it in the dining-room all by oneself."

"I'm sure it must be," he said sympathetically. "So you're roaming about alone to-day? No governess, no chaperon?"

"I don't go beyond our own place," she said quickly; "and if Mademoiselle had been at home I should have had to stay in and do lessons. This was a most unexpected holiday, but, of course, I never thought I should meet anyone."

"Perfect!" cried Quinn rapturously.

Olave in her innocence thought he was alluding to the sandwiches which he was now devouring voraciously, as if he had suddenly discovered how extremely hungry he was.

"So you won't drive me away? You won't prosecute me for trespassing? I've an idea your aunt must be rather strict—the one I mean who doesn't like you to leave any paper about!" he proceeded, in a light bantering tone.

"Oh, she is very kind," said Olave quickly, feeling as if she had given a false impression of Miss

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Ardern. "And, of course, you must come here whenever you like. My aunt will be delighted. You mustn't be in the least afraid of being prosecuted!" She said it so earnestly that Guy laughed again.

By this time he had finished all that remained of the sandwiches and was beginning to sample the very excellent plum-cake. Something to drink would have added immeasurably to his enjoyment but girls, young ones at least, never gave any attention to that part of a banquet, he reflected ruefully.

"What are you writing?" she asked, her eyes falling upon the writing-block.

"A novel," said Quinn briefly. He had a very great dislike to mentioning his work.

"A novel? How perfectly lovely! When will it be published? I do hope I shall be allowed to read it. Do you know I have never seen an author before? I imagined they were always quite old—much older I mean," she added quickly. "Do you think I should be allowed to read it? Only the other day my aunt took a novel away from me."

"Well, I'm afraid if she's at all strict she won't let you read this one. Perhaps when you are older—" He looked at her critically. Clearly this unknown aunt was a person to be approached with caution and prudence. He had a kind of chuckling wish that she could see Miss Primavera sitting there now, gravely discoursing with a total stranger.

"But I've read lots of novels really," she protested; "only Aunt Aggie likes to choose them."

"I'm hoping that you haven't read any of mine," he said.

Guy could never keep a certain tenderness out of his voice when he was speaking to a pretty woman, and this child was really adorable.

"I can't tell," she said simply, "because I don't

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know your name. You weren't at the Park when Aunt Aggie and I last went over there to tea."

"Oh, don't let us tell each other our names!" cried Guy.

"I can ask Lady Mercer," said Olave.

She was laughing now.

"Oh, don't do that please! Miss Judy would at once discover my hiding-place and insist upon accompanying me with all the dogs! I should know no peace. Besides I was hoping, you see, that you'd have another picnic to-morrow, not quite such a lonely one as you had to-day. Those sandwiches were simply delicious, they're the nicest things I've ever eaten. I feel as if I'd fed on honey-dew like the poet only perhaps these were slightly more substantial. Do please have a picnic to-morrow, here in this very spot, and invite me to come!"

His blue eyes held hers. Olave flushed beneath that admiring, almost tender, scrutiny. She was flattered at the thought that this man—an author and perhaps a very clever one—should wish to see her again. The first bite of the apple was very sweet.

"I'm not sure," she said a little reluctantly.

"Will your aunt be back to-morrow?" inquired Quinn.

He knew all about aunts, and was aware that they could be more perverse and formidable even than parents whose prerogatives they sometimes considered themselves justified in assuming. And if Miss Primavera's aunt were not strict and vigilant as yet she would soon discover the necessity of acquiring those disagreeable protective qualities.

"No, she's away till Friday or Saturday."

"Then you've nearly a week of freedom. What can the objection be? Mademoiselle?" he suggested.

"Oh, no, she doesn't care about picnics; she says

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the flies get into everything and she's afraid of wasps. But she can have her lunch indoors. I don't do any lessons between half past twelve and three, and if I have a picnic she generally takes a siesta. She likes that better than anything."

"Wise woman," said Guy. "But it seems to me that all these things point to the fact that you ought to be very kind and get up another delightful picnic for my especial amusement to-morrow."

Still she looked hesitating, although she was secretly immensely flattered by his eagerness, as well as by the unconcealed admiration in his blue eyes. They were so *very* blue.

"I'm not quite sure that Aunt Aggie would approve," said Olave at last.

"But need she know anything about it?" Quinn hazarded.

Her young slight body seemed to stiffen and straighten.

"I always tell Aunt Aggie everything," she said, with an adorable little touch of primness in her voice that enchanted Guy.

"That is very sweet and frank of you, of course," he said. "Still all rules, even the most iron ones, have their proper exceptions. I can't really see, you know, that she could have any objection. A picnic is such a very youthful innocent form of recreation. And a picnic in your own woods, too! Only you must bring a very much larger supply of sandwiches, for I am sure to be very hungry."

By this time the cake had also disappeared, and Guy taking a cigarette from his case lit it and began to smoke.

Olave forgot her shyness in the half hour that followed and talked to him with an easy frankness. There was something youthful and almost boyish-looking about Guy Quinn. His fair smooth shaven

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face, his laughing blue eyes, his thick brown hair with the little crinkly wave in it that gave it almost a sculptured appearance, all contributed to this aspect of youth. As he sat there by her side she felt as little afraid of him as she did of the "Mercer boys" —Judy and Ella's big brothers—who teased and tormented her almost as if she had been a little sister of their own. Only he was so very much nicer than either of the Mercers, Olave decided, and he made no attempt to tease and torment her. On the contrary he treated her in a quietly deferential way as if she had been his equal in age. And even when the cigarette was finished and the paper that had held the sandwiches and cake meticulously folded up and consigned to a little grave in the moss dug by his own pen-knife, she did not attempt to go away. It was in fact past four o'clock when he at last decided that considerations of prudence as well as of tea recommended a return to Cheldon Park.

Prudence? Quinn was not the man to serve too rigorously under that cold banner. This girl, flung abruptly across his path, was very charming, very lovely, and he enjoyed talking to her. She was fresh, innocent, simple, and wholly unspoiled. He had been inclined to regard youth as a callow, immature thing, a mere page to be presently inscribed; he had never until now realized how joyous and attractive and profoundly interesting a thing it could be.

At parting he held out his hand.

"If you will let me come and work here again to-morrow, Miss Primavera, I shall be very grateful. I haven't done such a good day's work for months."

"Please do," she said, and the soft pink color flooded her face. "I mean you must always come whenever you like."

"I am certain to be very hungry about one

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o'clock," he continued, "and so I hope there will be a miracle and that a kind and compassionate raven will bring me some luncheon."

He laughed, looking down into her eyes as he spoke. Olave was suddenly aware of the beauty of those eyes that were gazing into hers. She shrank instinctively from him, almost as if she were afraid that he would read her thoughts.

When she had gone a little way down the hill she turned round and looked at him. He was making his way with easy swinging strides across the steep sloping footpath that dipped from Ardern's Knoll toward the village of Nether Cheldon and which made a short cut, too, to Cheldon Park. When he had vanished round the bend of the hill Olave turned and hurried back home across the fields. She was afraid even now that her unusually long absence might have excited comment and perhaps anxiety.

CHAPTER V

A PICNIC IN ARDERN'S KNOLL

OLAVE felt excited at the little unexpected adventure. Life was always quiet and rather monotonous at the Manor, disturbed only by Lady Trent's impetuous and flying visits. Except for an occasional visit to the Mercers Olave saw but little of their neighbors. Miss Ardern very rarely entertained, though she sometimes gave a dinner-party when Felicity was staying with her, fearing lest she might, otherwise, find it too dull at Nether Cheldon. But Felicity found the dinner-parties even more dull than the solitary evenings spent with Agnes. She had not as yet met Lady Mercer and Agnes had

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hoped they would perhaps take a liking to each other. Olave was sometimes allowed to invite Judy and Ella Mercer to tea with her, and she was friendly with both girls, but they were always so full of their own interests that they often made her feel a little out of it. Like most only children she did not understand "chaff," and the Mercers' chaff was of a personal and rather boisterous kind, and she was often secretly wounded by it. She did not suspect that the lonely, isolated life she led was all part of Miss Ardern's deliberate plan to keep her from the pitfalls to which Felicity had fallen such a ready victim. From an unwise early marriage Olave was to be most vigorously defended, even at the cost of a little natural childish enjoyment. She was like the Princess in the fairy tale consigned to a tower lest the evil fate foretold by the Bad Fairy should overtake her. Alas, that when danger drew near her good fairy in the person of Miss Ardern should have been found not napping but absent!

Olave scarcely slept at all that night. She lay awake happy in the contemplation of the day's adventure. To her this good-looking stranger with the beautiful blue eyes was the embodiment of that Prince Charming of whom most girls in their teens —however carefully guarded—are wont to dream. And to-morrow she would see him again. In ten or twelve hours' time she would climb the steep slope up to Ardern's Knoll, and find him waiting for her there on the fallen tree-trunk. Conscience ceased to trouble her with unwelcome scruples. She began to regard Aunt Aggie's absence as a matter for the most heartfelt congratulation. Had she been at home she would most certainly have disapproved of all that had passed to-day, and placed a firm veto upon any repetition of the occurrence. It was wonderful to think that this man who wrote books (she

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was sure that they were very beautiful and thrilling with charming love-scenes, like the novel that Miss Ardern had so recently taken away from her with more than a little severity) should have invited an ignorant girl like herself to prepare a picnic for him. She resolved to go thither on the morrow provided with every possible delicacy for his refreshment. She felt quite capable, with this new courage and determination of hers, to deal with Mademoiselle if she proposed any objections to her spending her free-time out of doors.

Olave fell asleep at last, and in her dreams she found herself under the shadow of the great beech trees at Ardern's Knoll, and the man whose name she did not know was coming toward her with both hands outstretched in welcome. And in her dreams she heard him say: "So you have come, dear Primavera."

When she awoke the summer dawn had already yielded to day. No one setting out upon a supreme adventure could have imagined or desired a more perfect June morning than the one that greeted her eyes as she leaped out of bed and ran flushed and eager to the window. On the lawn below the dew was white and thick, and a big speckled young thrush was evidently enjoying his breakfast of fat worms. A mist still concealed the more distant range of hills, but Ardern's Knoll stood out quite clearly with a deep, almost colorless, softness. The cool air was fragrant with the perfume of mignonette and early roses.

Olave's thoughts were full of the proposed picnic. She dressed herself hastily and ran down into the garden to gather strawberries for the feast. They were best, she thought, when gathered thus with the dew still upon them. There would not be very many as yet, but what there were should certainly be prof-

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fered for Quinn's delectation. An under-gardener, a lad who had but lately come to work at the Manor, watched her as her slim, straight, young figure bent down to gather the ripe fruit.

Spade in hand he approached her.

"Thur be two foine peaches in the 'ouse, miss," he said a trifle sheepishly, grabbing at a rust-colored forelock. "Them won't keep neither till Miss Ardern comes back."

"Have you got the key, Luke?" she inquired.

"No, miss, but Baynes 'ull be 'ere in a moment. He wur saying only yesterday that twur a pity them two peaches weren't ripe for her leddyship last week."

Olave turned away a little impatiently. Yes, that was part of the tradition of the Manor, all that was best must be kept for Lady Trent who so rarely condescended to set foot in the place, and had not the slightest concern for any of the servants who made such spontaneous efforts on her behalf. She went on gathering the fruit until the arrival of Baynes, the old head-gardener, who had grown bent and gnarled, as one of the apple-trees in the orchard, in the service of the Ardern family. He could remember as a lad the Squire bringing home his beautiful bride to Nether Cheldon; he had watched the two "young ladies" grow up and had secretly sympathized with the "master" because he had no son to succeed him. He had been present in a fine new suit of clothes at the wedding of Sir Digby Trent and "little Miss Fay," as she had been called in those days. All this was now ancient history, but he had a specially soft corner for Olave in his heart though privately he held the opinion that "she wurn't a patch on her mother." But when she teased and annoyed him by picking flowers he particularly treasured, or fruit that he was saving for "the table,"

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he used to shake his head ruefully and murmur: "'Er be that loike 'er mother 'er be, one 'ud think it was Miss Fay over again!"

So that when Olave approached him this morning with a request for two nice large peaches, he stumbled off to the greenhouse without a word of protest, and with a smile twisting his aged withered lips.

Thus provided with the nucleus of a feast in all ways appropriate to the occasion Olave returned to the house to have her own breakfast. Mademoiselle always took advantage of Miss Ardern's absence to partake of this meal in her own room; she had never accustomed herself to the barbarous British habit of assembling *en famille* for that first repast; to her Gallic mind it was an unendurable tyranny from which she always escaped when she could. Lessons did not begin till nine o'clock, and surely it was impossible for Olave to find any opportunity of getting into mischief before that hour.

Olave found herself utterly without appetite. The prospect of the picnic, of seeing her unknown and delightful friend again, filled her with a strange trembling excitement. It was such a new feeling that she did not understand it. It was the beautiful June day that was making her feel so wonderfully alive, she told herself. When she walked she had the curious new sensation that she was treading on air. Her eyes shone and she looked extraordinarily pretty although she was perfectly ignorant of the fact. This was to be a day of days. Olave left untasted and almost unnoticed the bacon and eggs on the sideboard, but she drank two cups of steaming hot coffee. She was glad to think that no one was present to witness this sudden failure of her usually healthy appetite. Aunt Agnes would probably have felt her pulse or taken her temperature, and perhaps even counseled a day in bed combined

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with the partaking of some old-fashioned and repulsive nostrum! She was fussy about Olave's health as women generally are when they have the care of another person's child.

But then had Miss Ardern been at the Manor that day she could never have planned her picnic in this cool, deliberate, conscienceless manner! When this thought occurred to her, Olave set it resolutely aside. Yet with her innocent joyousness there was mingled a faint little teasing scruple that flashed in and out of her thoughts like a worrying gnat.

Mademoiselle appeared at nine o'clock with her face bound up, announcing in a lugubrious tone that she had been suffering torments of tooth-ache all night, and, if she could have the motor to go to the station, she thought it would be desirable to make a second expedition to Cheltenham and seek professional advice. Olave assented to this with a feeling of enormous relief. She condoled most sympathetically with the sufferer and went at once to order the motor to take her to the station. Ten o'clock saw the departure, with face still muffled, of the French lady, and Olave was left to amuse herself as she pleased. It was a comfort to feel that she was now quite free. She would not have to tell the tiniest fib to account for her absence. The prospect of a whole holiday increased her pleasure a hundredfold.

Left thus to her own devices Olave dressed herself with unusual care, putting on her prettiest white blouse and a short, trim, white serge skirt. She tied her hair with the big black bow as Hortense had taught her to do in accordance with Lady Trent's instructions last week. The girl made a charmingly fresh and youthful picture as she sallied forth to Ardern's Knoll much as her mother had done nearly eighteen years ago. This time she carried a basket

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instead of the string bag. She had coaxed the cook into giving her a little pot of cream fresh from the dairy, and some jam tarts in addition to the sandwiches and cake. Her hero, though god-like, had, as she knew, the appetite of a mortal.

Of course, he would hardly be there yet unless he had come early in order to write. She did not expect him at the trysting-place until nearly one o'clock when he would find everything in readiness for him. The day was serenely fair; there was not a cloud except those soft white ones on the horizon that never signified rain. The sun shone with unusual warmth, but Olave was far too unmindful of physical conditions to feel the steep climb up to the Knoll although she was burdened by a fairly heavy basket. It could not be possible that he would fail her when everything was so perfect and all obstacles had melted away of their own accord. It seemed as if Nature, too, had lent a hand, and was determined to co-operate with them to ensure that their day should be a success.

Quinn, light-hearted, careless and even a little reckless, always ready to snatch the sweetness of the passing moment, was already sitting in the green arbor among the beeches and bracken when Olave entered the Knoll like a white woodland fairy.

He had had as yet no answer from Lady Trent to disturb his thoughts or to sharpen the little scruple he had felt about coming. Her letter would surely arrive to-morrow. Yet, what woman ever answered a proposal of marriage on the very day promised? He must not hope to find the well-known envelope of thin mauve paper lying on his breakfast tray on the morrow. And to-day he was still free. He intended to enjoy his freedom in the company of that delightful child—the young, sweet incarnation of Primavera.

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For of course she would come, there could be no reasonable doubt of that. Her aunt—narrow-minded *prepotente* woman as he libelously characterized poor Miss Ardern in his thoughts—was most fortunately away from home. An intriguing person probably, jealous of her vicarious authority over this delicious rosebud of a mortal. He did not like his own aunts and he felt quite certain that he should not like Miss Primavera's. It was a comfort to feel that he would in all probability never meet her, never even know her name. To-day was his, and the glory and sweetness thereof!

Quinn lit a cigarette and began to smoke. He was in an indolent mood and he fell to dreaming. How he wished it had been possible to change the *venue* of this delicious adventure from the little wood perched high on the Cotswolds to a seashore spot in Italy, beautiful, sheltered, sun-steeped, with a *pineta* whispering soft music in the background and flaming oleanders clothing the banks close down to the shore with their exquisite fragile pink and white blossoms that looked so splendid against the brilliant blue sky and sea. He had known such a spot—had known it with Felicity Trent.

Yet here, too, there was beauty, although it was an austere, bleak, mitigated beauty as if Nature in the North were a thrifty, parsimonious housewife who objected to scattering her gifts with that prodigality and largesse characteristic of her in the South. That rugged line of grey wolds visible through a little gap in the green branches was, however, charming enough, patterned by the moving shadows of those pale clouds that traveled dreamily northwards. Rich fields of corn that had scarcely yet begun to whiten for the harvest rose sheer against the sky. And the pasture-lands were of a vivid green—one seldom saw such green fields as those in Italy. Here and

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there on the hill a group of farm-buildings stood out stark and grey with scarcely a tree to protect or shelter them. Often they were flanked by fat, opulent-looking haystacks and low outbuildings. Far down in the valley, so softly delicately green, the Chell twisted its way like a ribbon, crossed by little rustic bridges beneath which the trout glanced past like brown transparent shadows. He liked the little villages that rose here and there, a few miles apart, on the banks of the stream, with their quaint names of Nether Cheldon, Upper Cheldon, Chel don Parva and Cheldon-on-the-Hill, this last being the most important, boasting, too, of a weekly market. There was something charming and old-world about them all.

Notwithstanding his idleness Quinn had not today that bleak and depressing sense of intellectual aridity which is one of the author's most dreaded foes, as unexpected in its onslaughts as it is capricious in inflicting them. It was simply that his mind was interested in other things, and he did not wish to work. He had done a good deal on the previous day before the interruption caused by Primavera's appearance, and he had been fairly satisfied with his achievement when he read it over later in the cold light of his north bedroom. One could not invariably be *à la hauteur*. Besides he could always flatter himself that if sometimes the matter failed him the manner never did. A sense of style, whether natural or acquired, seldom abandons the man who possesses and honors it. And Quinn had a rare instinctive sense of style which for ten years he had carefully cultivated and improved. Some day he would write a book that Primavera might read, fantastically, beautifully written, unlike anything else he had done. A book to make those young grave eyes darken and glow.

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He looked up and saw as he had seen yesterday the girl standing there in the arch formed by the trees. She was dressed in white and she approached him with swift light feet. He breathed a little sigh of relief. She was quite as lovely as he had pictured her. Her shining eyes, the delicate pink flush on her face, the lips parted in a smile, entranced him afresh. It was a relief to him to know that she hadn't thought better of it, as at one moment he had feared she might, for surely there must have been some slight scruple as to the propriety of the proceeding to one who had evidently been brought up with quite old-fashioned strictness? He sprang up and went toward her, taking the basket from her hand.

"By Jove, it's heavy," he said, setting it on the ground. "Did you carry it up the hill yourself?"

"Yes, but it didn't seem heavy," she answered, and slipped down upon the moss at his feet, her eyes raised to his.

So he had come, he was really there, had arrived even before her, despite her eagerness to make all ready for him. And she, on her part, had been so afraid that he would forget or that perhaps Lady Mercer might claim his company.

Quinn lifted the white napkin and peered into the basket.

"I only wish it were luncheon-time," he said catching a glimpse of the monster peaches.

"It's only half past twelve," said Olave, who was feeling hungry herself after her rather sketchy breakfast.

Guy looked at her and smiled.

"Must we be slaves?" he said whimsically, and his blue eyes danced. "Abroad, half past twelve is quite a fashionable hour. Let me see—hard-boiled eggs, chicken sandwiches, cucumber sandwiches, cold

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lamb in slices—" he was reading what was written on each of the packets neatly done up in white paper. "And cake and peaches and strawberries and cream. This is a banquet for the gods, my dear Primavera. Do you always do yourself as well as this?"

Olave laughed. He had quickly put her at her ease; her heart was beating more steadily, that odd trembling in her limbs had ceased. Last night to her imagination he had seemed like a young god, splendid if a trifle terrible. Now in the broad commonplace daylight as he sat there chuckling over the contents of the basket he was only an ordinary young man, handsome and gay and boyish in his pleasure, almost as youthful as Tom Mercer himself.

"Are you so hungry?" she asked.

"I'm always hungry when I see delicious food," he assured her.

"Then I'll lay the cloth at once," she said. "You shall eat as soon as I've put everything ready."

Guy sat down on the old-tree-trunk and watched her.

First the napkin was laid out on the moss, looking, indeed, like a square snowy oasis in the midst of the green. Olave secured the corners with four stones, then she produced the plates, the glasses in their wicker holders and the small knives and forks. She had some little trays of Japanese make upon which she daintily arranged the strawberries and the two peaches, whilst upon the others she placed the rest of the food. Then she gathered some young fronds of bracken and decorated the table with them. As he watched her he thought of a child preparing a feast for her dolls. The slim sunburnt hands manipulated everything with a curious fastidious care, dainty, delicate and skilful. It amused him to watch her, this lively unawakened child!

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"Now you may come," she told him when at last the preparations were complete.

Quinn approached the table. To-day he was wearing a cool-looking suit of white flannel with white shoes, and a blue tie that matched his eyes and emphasized their blue.

"You have brought everything I like best," he told her.

"I'm so glad. I gathered the strawberries myself quite early. I was sure you liked them. Ours are very good this year."

They made merry over the meal, like two children enjoying an unexpected holiday, freed from the supervision of their elders.

"Did Lady Mercer mind your being away such a long time yesterday afternoon?" she asked.

"I'm afraid she did. You see she had asked some people to lunch to meet me and I'd forgotten all about it. Still I was thankful to have escaped. That little imp Judy said if I stayed out so long again she would come to look for me with the dogs! I can not understand why Lady Mercer, who is such a charming woman herself, can allow her children to be so impertinent to her guests and even to laugh at them."

"But she must have wondered where you had been?" said Olave.

"Primavera, like all women you are too inquisitive. But I may tell you this, she accepted my perfectly plausible explanation."

Indeed it had been a wonderfully plausible one, worthy of all credence. Quinn, unlike most authors, was a fluent speaker.

"And to-day? What will she think about to-day?"

"To-day I told her that she mustn't expect me. I am finishing a book, you know. That demands, as

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perhaps you are not aware, the most rigorous and uninterrupted solitude!"

Her brow clouded a little. She looked perplexed.

"But you had to deceive her then?" she said in a low tone.

"And you?" he reminded her, "didn't you have to be a little deceitful, too? Especially," he glanced down at the basket, "when you went to order lunch."

"I never said a word that wasn't quite true," said Olave, feeling a little guilty.

"Nor did I," said Guy triumphantly. "But when two people want to have a picnic all by themselves in the woods they needn't tell everyone in the world about it! It would spoil half the fun. Trivial innocent deceptions although deplorable are sometimes quite necessary. I could hardly tell Lady Mercer and those terrible girls, Judy and Ella or Babs, as they call her, that I was going to have a picnic with Miss Primavera in the woods. They would most certainly have wanted to join us with all the dogs!"

"Oh, I'm very glad you didn't tell them," said Olave earnestly. "They would have guessed at once who I was and, perhaps, they would have told my aunt when she comes back."

"And if your aunt had been at home to-day would you have told her?" he inquired.

Olave reddened slightly. "If she had been at home I should never have dreamed of coming at all. I don't know whether I should have told her about yesterday. But yesterday wasn't my fault, was it? It was an accident my meeting you here. I didn't deliberately plan it."

"And to-day you think it is really your fault?" he asked. He liked to watch the soft rose-colored flood ebb and flow in her expressive face.

"Yes. If it is wrong I am doing it on purpose to-

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day," she said with that honesty to which she had been so sedulously trained.

"Oh, but it isn't in the least wrong!" he assured her gaily. "Take my word for that. Such things are done every day and no one thinks anyone else a penny the worse for them. And it was very sweet and kind of you to give me so much pleasure and to bring me such a lovely lunch."

He was eating strawberries now with such evident enjoyment that Olave put only two or three on her own plate and left all the rest for him. She also helped herself to cream with niggardly hand, for she had the feminine instinct of sacrifice. Quinn was egotistic and unobservant, and he never noticed the little ruse. Had he done so it would assuredly have touched him. He finished the strawberries and then proceeded to eat both the peaches. Olave was enchanted.

She insisted upon doing all the "clearing away," as she called it, and while she was engaged in this new activity Quinn sat on the tree-trunk, smoking and idly watching her.

"What a perfect little wife you will make one of these days to some lucky chap," he said suddenly.

His look more than the words brought a swift flush to her face.

"A wife? Oh, that won't be for ages," she said. "I'm not even out yet."

"How old are you?" he asked.

"I shall be seventeen in September."

"Lots of girls," he observed thoughtfully, "get married at seventeen."

"Yes, I know. Mother was married at that age," said Olave. "But then it was different, she was very, *very* beautiful."

There was something so unconscious, so innocent about the simple way in which she made this state-

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ment that Quinn could not help exclaiming impulsively:

"Oh, Primavera, my dear child, hasn't any one told you yet that *you* are very, very beautiful?"

Olave started. At first she thought he was laughing at her, but as she looked at him she saw in his face such an expression of serious and tender admiration that her heart gave a wild, fierce throb.

"Of course they haven't, it wouldn't be true," she said, some instinct telling her to treat this speech lightly. "Why I'm plain as plain! Judy and Babs have told me so heaps of times."

He liked the blunt little speech, so frankly and unaffectedly made.

"Come here, Primavera," said Guy, indicating with his hand the unoccupied space upon the old tree-trunk; "sit down here where I can see you."

Olave obeyed. Her shady hat hid her face a little, and she was thankful for this. Again she felt that strange trembling in her limbs, and was conscious of the violent beating of her heart, physical conditions that perplexed and alarmed her and made her wonder if she were going to be ill. Could it be true that mere happiness could affect one like this, in this disturbing, unsetting manner?

"You know I don't in the least agree with Judy and Babs," he told her. "I think you are perfectly lovely. I don't suppose your mother was ever half as beautiful. People always feel obliged to say girls are never so pretty as their mothers were before them. I often think the reverse is true."

"Oh, wait till you see my mother," said Olave.

He felt that he could indeed wait for such an improbable event.

"Only," continued Olave, "she is hardly ever here. She doesn't like Cheldon so she doesn't live with us."

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"Would she approve of our picnic?" he asked. The subject did not interest him, but he hoped to detain her by this desultory conversation. Besides he enjoyed talking to her, looking at her, uttering words that must surely seem bold and daring to her inexperience. She was awakening under his touch as a flower expands in the summer sunshine. The process fascinated him as an artist; he foresaw no peril then either for himself or for the girl sitting beside him.

Besides if he intended anything at all he intended to put an end to the adventure that very day. Prudence suggested this course, a cold prudence that had no regard for Olave but was bound up with his own egoism.

"I don't know, she leaves everything to my aunt. I don't think she cares much what I do, as long as I'm polite and agreeable," she added, remembering that recent rebuke of Felicity's.

"You mean she doesn't care for you?" he said in a soft voice.

"Not—not very much," replied Olave in a low tone.

"She must be a very unnatural woman then," he said warmly. "She ought to be proud to have such a beautiful daughter!"

"I'm sure she doesn't think I'm beautiful at all," said Olave. "And you—you can not really think that I am."

"I wish I could convince you," said Guy.

Olave was silent.

"You poor child," he continued commiseratingly; "what a thin time you must have with Judy Mercer who calls you plain, and a mother whom you hardly ever see, and an aunt who doesn't approve of picnics!"

"Oh, but I'm very happy really," she assured him,

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aghast at this unflattering summary of her situation. "I am afraid I have given you a wrong impression. My aunt doesn't disapprove of picnics, of picnics with the Mercers for instance, we have had them several times. I only thought she wouldn't like me to have one alone with a stranger—with someone she didn't know!"

He was obliged to admit to himself that even the least exacting of aunts might well have raised such an objection.

"Oh, well, I dare say she's right to be strict," he said, "as a general rule, you know. But circumstances alter cases."

On the whole he was glad to think that he would never have to justify himself to this unknown lady. But he felt an unreasoning sense of anger against that absent, negligent mother.

Then, as if to convey something of this unspoken sympathy, Guy put out his hand and slipped his fingers quickly upon hers. The action took her completely by surprise. Her heart beat a little more quickly. He was aware that the hand he was touching trembled, like a little, fluttering, imprisoned bird.

The first touch of love is a bewildering thing. Olave felt a strange little sense of fear; she wanted to take away her hand and yet she did not dare.

"We must make the most of these days," he said softly; "of course I can't shirk lunch at the Park every day, Judy would begin to suspect something. But I often take a walk after tea, the evenings are really delicious now. I should like to do a little trespassing between five and six to-morrow if I may. It is Sunday so I am sure you will not have any lessons to do."

"Oh, I don't think I ought—" she began.

"I want you to understand that I do really think you very beautiful and charming," he said.

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Olave had an instinctive feeling that she ought to resent both his words and his action. She quietly released her hand and said:

"Why do you say things like that to me? No one has ever done so before. And if you were to talk like that to Judy she would simply scream with laughter."

"I know she would so I don't say them to her. Besides they wouldn't be true. You're much nicer and far prettier than Judy."

"Oh, I'm not really. Judy is tremendously popular. Everyone likes her," she maintained obstinately. At the back of her thoughts there was a dislike that he should think it necessary to treat her differently from Judy.

She stood up now. "I must be going home," she said.

She felt the slight tension acutely, and conscience was beginning to whisper its subtle scruples.

"But you'll come to-morrow?" said Guy. "You see I shan't be here many days more."

They were facing each other, and his eyes were looking down into hers.

"You're not offended with me, I hope?" he said.

"Oh, I wasn't rude, was I?" she cried in distress. "Mother was so angry with me, only the other day, because I was rude."

Guy laughed. "No, you were not rude," he answered. "But perhaps you did not like me to say what I did."

"I wasn't sure if my aunt would like it if she knew," said Olave with downcast eyes.

"Then I shouldn't tell her," said Quinn laughing. "It's always a pity to distress people unnecessarily."

He was relieved to observe that she joined in the laugh.

"To-morrow then," he said coolly.

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"I never said I was coming," murmured Olave. She picked up the empty basket.

"The servants will think I have the most enormous appetite," she said.

They parted, each going their different ways. Quinn did not wish to risk being seen walking with her, or he would certainly have offered to accompany her part of the way home and carry the basket for her. But Lady Mercer—most amiable and charming of women—was yet prone to gossip, and her two daughters were little terrors in their frank outspokenness. They made him the butt of their wit. And it would never do to disclose his adventure to them when in a few weeks' time he might have to inform Lady Mercer of his engagement to Felicity Trent.

He had meant to end it all to-day, and yet when it came to the point he had urged her to meet him again. There was something fresh and unusual and stimulating about the whole affair that was very attractive to him. Yet, as he walked home that day across those June fields strewn with flowers he was obliged to confess to himself that he had almost been betrayed into the egregious folly of making love to pretty little Miss Primavera.

CHAPTER VI

MORNING SERVICE AND AN EXPLANATION

THE next day was wet. With all the capriciousness of an English summer the blue skies gave place to low drifts of somber ink-colored clouds that traveled in gloomy battalions from the west, driven

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upon the wings of a strong wind that was still brackish from contact with Atlantic breakers.

It was an unwritten rule at the Manor that every inmate should punctually attend morning service at the parish church of Nether Cheldon. Bad weather in no way absolved anyone from this duty, consequently at a quarter to eleven Olave and Mademoiselle set forth upon their walk to the village. The French lady belonged to a Huguenot family and had been carefully chosen for this reason among a host of other applicants for the privilege of teaching Olave. It was part of Miss Ardern's general scheme for keeping her niece quite free from any influences, spiritual or social, that might in the long run prove "dangerous." It can, therefore, be the more readily understood how much she disliked the thought of her sister's marrying a Catholic. A young Catholic stepfather, however careless he might be in the practice of his religion, might have a most undesirable influence upon Olave at a highly impressionable age. It had not taken long for Miss Ardern to decide it would be far wiser that the girl should remain at Nether Cheldon as her mother wished during the next few years.

Olave had half hoped and half feared to see her nameless friend sitting in the large front pew that was relegated to the use of the inhabitants of Cheldon Park. Lady Mercer nearly always arrived late, and her rather noisy entrance generally created a disturbance during the singing of the psalms. The pew allotted to the Manor was in a little side chapel which in old Catholic days had been dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, although most of the evidence to this fact had been remorselessly swept away. A slab on the wall had been erected of recent years to the memory of Hammond Ardern and of his wife Marian, an act of filial piety which had owed its

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inception to Agnes Ardern. Olave knew the words of this marble slab by heart. Near it was another with a more complicated inscription setting forth the virtues of the late Henry Hammond Ardern and his wife Barbara in the somewhat bombastic phraseology of the early nineteenth century, which had been placed there by their only son Hammond Ardern, Olave's grandfather. Some day there would be more slabs, her own, Aunt Aggie's, perhaps her mother's. She pictured hers sometimes as bearing the words *Sacred to the Memory of Olave Trent, only daughter of the Above.* For, of course, her mother would die first, and her name would occupy another slab. She was in the midst of these meditations when Lady Mercer came up the aisle followed by Judy and Babs and the younger boy, a child of seven years old. They took their places, and Olave still hardly dared to raise her eyes to look at them. From her seat she commanded a view sideways of the Mercers' pew. She bent her eyes over her book and tried to join in the singing, but her throat felt very dry and no sound issued from it. Another sleepless night had wrought havoc with her nerves. When at last she glanced timidly toward the place where Lady Mercer was sitting, with her golden-haired boy on one side and Babs on the other, Olave saw that they were unaccompanied by their visitor. Perhaps he had excused himself on the plea of work. She knew that Lady Mercer gave her guests full liberty to do exactly as they chose, and even Judy and Babs were permitted to stay away from church on trivial grounds that would not for a moment have made Miss Ardern relax her rule. Still, in spite of the little sharp pang of disappointment his absence was almost a relief. It would have been decidedly embarrassing to meet thus, under the eye of Lady Mercer and Judy. Per-

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haps they would have had to pretend that they were strangers to each other so as not to run any risk of betraying those secret meetings in Ardern's Knoll. All of a sudden a little sense of shame took possession of Olave; she saw for the first time something rather humiliating in the fact that she actually feared discovery. She trembled to think of what she would have to endure should the episode ever come to Judy's ears, her shrill malice would be more unendurable than the well-merited scolding Aunt Agnes would certainly bestow. For Olave, in spite of her youth and innocence, had realized that there had been something ambiguous in Guy's attitude yesterday when he had held her hand in his and assured her that she was beautiful. It had belonged to the category of forbidden grown-up things which happened perhaps to older girls if the novels spoke truly. She was aware that she should dislike Aunt Agnes, or indeed anyone in the world, to know of that episode, and the thought that she was bent on concealing it even at the cost of deceit made her tingle anew with shame.

She dropped her book; the little crash induced Mademoiselle's eyes to rest momentarily upon her pupil.

"Faites attention!" she said in a loud whisper.

Olave picked up the book. She fixed her eyes again upon the slab which was sacred to the memory of Henry Hammond Ardern, her great-grandfather, and Barbara, his wife. To judge by the description of their characters they must have been very perfect, almost faultless, people. It occurred to her for the first time to wonder why no memorial to her own father found a place in the little chapel. Why had her mother omitted to place one there? Why did she never mention him? Why did her aunt gently change the subject when she, Olave, showed any disposition to question her upon the subject of her lost

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parent? A deep mystery seemed to enfold his personality in an impenetrable obscurity. She was roused from her reverie by the sudden appearance of old Mr. Glynn, the rector, in the pulpit. He had been a friend of her grandfather's; he had christened her mother and aunt as well as herself, he had been one of the three officiating clergy when Felicity was married to Sir Digby Trent. If he had been less deaf and old, Olave thought she would have sought an opportunity of questioning him about her father. He must have seen him, must have known him.

When the last hymn had been sung and the service was over, Olave put away her books in a little drawer, locked it, and followed Mademoiselle down the aisle just behind Lady Mercer. When they had all reached the porch, Lady Mercer turned to Olave and said in her suave rather affected manner:

"Well, Olave, is your aunt still away?"

"Yes, Lady Mercer," said Olave.

"Where did you get that hat, Olave?" said Judy.

She was a few months older than Olave and at least two inches smaller. She had rather a charming little face with a very fair pink and white complexion, ("All my children have such lovely skins," Lady Mercer was wont to say complacently,) curly golden hair that stuck out all over her head like a mop, blue eyes, and a definitely retroussé nose that gave her an impertinent look. She was as sharp as a needle and ruled her younger sister Ella, alias Babs, absolutely.

"Come along, children," said Lady Mercer, moving down the sodden path to the lane where her sumptuous motor was waiting to convey her home.

"Oh, can't we walk, mother? It isn't raining," protested Judy.

"Yes, of course you can," said Lady Mercer.

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Her plan of education, if indeed it could be honored by such a name, was "to let the children develop on their own lines," as she was wont to express it. She never punished them and only scolded them when they got in her way at inconvenient moments. Her husband had been dead some years and the upbringing of their children had been, during his lifetime, a fruitful source of disagreement between them. He had only lived long enough to instil some sense of discipline into his edlest son, Tom. The others displayed all the results of that folly and indulgence with which it had been Lady Mercer's endeavor to surround them. She laughed at their little insolences, at their utter want of respect and reverence for anything or anyone; she delighted in their wit even at the expense of her friends. No more spoiled children existed than hers, and Miss Ardern had been careful to arrange that there should be no great intimacy between them and Olave.

Olave walked sedately home by the side of Mademoiselle. It was true that the rain had stopped for the moment but the sky was still dark with heavy clouds and gave all the promise of a wet afternoon and evening. She began to consider the feasibility of climbing the hill to Ardern's Knoll after tea as Quinn had suggested. She had almost made up her mind this morning that she would not go. Conscience had reminded her sharply that it would be wrong. But her wish to see Quinn again was very great. It seemed to be pushing her almost imperatively toward him. He was to her like a strong overwhelming force that subdues automatically all existing lesser forces, minimizing even her fear of discovery. Not to see him was just the one thing she felt she could not bear. She imagined him calling to her—compelling her to come to him. His light touch flicked at all the solid rules laid down

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for her conduct by Aunt Agnes, and they were powerless to resist him. He was, indeed, completely master of the situation, and Olave was as wax in his hands.

Meantime Quinn had spent the morning shivering in his north bedroom, restless, unoccupied. He wished he had the courage to ask for a fire. That black yawning cavity of a grate stared at him bleakly. Probably though with such a wind as this blowing it would smoke and then he would be driven out of his fastness. The alternative promised to be so unpleasant that he huddled himself into a great coat and sitting down at the table made a pretence of writing.

Yes, this visit to Cheldon had been a mistake. Lady Mercer was charming—he had met her in Florence the year before—but this was his first introduction to her family and they had been a most disagreeable revelation to him. If it had not been for Primavera—dear little Primavera with her great worshiping eyes that so soothed his wounded vanity smarting from Judy's considered impertinences—he would certainly have cut short his visit and returned to town yesterday. There was really nothing to keep him there, and in spite of its apparent luxury he found a great deal missing to that meticulous comfort to which he had accustomed himself. And all the time Felicity's delay in answering him was harassing his nerves. Nor was his conscience perfectly easy with regard to Olave. Would it not be wise and kind to cut the matter short and return to London? It would at least be more dignified.

He had wasted two long golden summer days in philandering with this charming unknown little girl in the woods. And he was quite prepared to make a further exhibition of folly by starting off this evening, in spite of wind and rain, in the hope of seeing

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her again. The wood would certainly prove extremely damp and disagreeable and chilly, and it was unlikely that she would come. She would never expect him to take a walk after those pitiless deluges of rain that must have soused the whole place. Yet, aware of his folly and imprudence, to give it all no worse name, Quinn announced his intention that afternoon at tea-time of going out for a walk before dinner.

"Oh, do take the dogs then," said Judy; "it'll save my going!"

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said Guy, regarding her with a cold irony that would have silenced anyone less impervious to snubs. "I always lose dogs."

"I don't expect they would follow you anyhow," remarked Judy; "dogs always know."

"Know what?" he inquired, lifting his eyebrows.

"Oh, know when a person is accustomed to them or is afraid of them," said Judy, with intentional insolence. Babs gave a little suppressed giggle, and Lady Mercer smiled as if Judy had said something very clever indeed.

The dogs at the Park were remarkable both for their number and for their vigorous and noisy boisterousness. When Judy took them for a constitutional she spent most of her time in hunting for them, in taking pieces of unsavory bone from them, and in bringing the culprits to summary justice. Aware of the painful reprisals that awaited the slightest error on their part, it was always a mystery to Quinn why they should evince such an extraordinary eagerness to accompany her.

"Well, we'll come with you anyhow," said Judy, who was aware that such a suggestion would not at all meet with his approval. "Babs and I haven't

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had a proper walk to-day and it's too wet to play tennis."

Something in Quinn's expression made Lady Mercer interfere.

"No, Judy darling, you mustn't interrupt Mr. Quinn. He's got very important work on hand and I know he likes to go alone so as to think about it. And the dogs are so noisy."

Judy gave one of her shrill little screams of laughter.

"Oh, I suppose you want to concoct your impassioned love-scenes as you go along!" she said, provokingly.

Quinn bestowed upon her a severe look.

"And my chatter would banish all those wonderful thoughts!" she proceeded mockingly.

"My *dear* Judy," murmured Lady Mercer.

Judy put her head on one side and looked enchantingly pretty, although rather in the style of a little soubrette.

"I could teach you a thing or two about girls," she said daringly.

"I don't doubt it," said Quinn satirically.

"I should like it, really like it without humbug, if you were to put me into one of your books!"

"I have my reputation to consider," he rejoined.

"You had better study us while you have the chance. Babs and I are really quite unique."

Guy did not answer. He went to the window and looked out at the sodden garden beyond. A light fine rain was still falling, but he felt incapable of abandoning his project. He lit a cigarette and strolled along the moist gravel path. Supposing the irrepressible Judy elected after all to accompany him, with Babs and all the dogs? She was quite capable of such a proceeding, and then farewell to the Green Arbor and little Miss Primavera! Sup-

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posing even now she were to discover where and in whose company he had spent the major part of those two golden, glorious days? Judy, who had dared to call the girl plain!

The rain had fallen steadily all the afternoon and everything was thoroughly soused. The trees in the avenue splashed cold drops into his face and down his neck as he passed quickly along, trying to avoid, as he went, those enormous puddles. Once out of sight of the innumerable windows of the Park, windows whose existence he had never until now dreamed of resenting, he insensibly quickened his steps, and left the Park by the north gate. Then he crossed the road, climbed a stile, and hurried up the steep long path which led toward the bleak hill upon which stood Ardern's Knoll looking like a little dark oasis on the crest of the wold. If the scene had seemed to possess beauty yesterday, bathed in summer sunshine under a laughing blue sky, he felt to-day that it was positively ugly in its bleak austerity.

Would she be there? He did not pause to tell himself that he had no right to care so greatly whether she came or not. He was consciously amusing himself without a glance at the future in which the girl might have to learn something of the pain of loss. He was extracting a delicate enjoyment from the adventure, was studying a "new type," as he called it to himself, yet he was aware that she was beginning to take it very seriously, indeed. Without any vanity he was obliged to admit that fact to himself. And in a sense he would not have it otherwise. He knew, he told himself, exactly how far he could go without inflicting any permanent wound upon her heart. She would have, as it were, a first tentative lesson in love, just enough for her to dream about when he had gone away, suddenly and secretly as he proposed to do. His emotions were agreeably stirred as he thought that per-

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haps she might even shed a few tears at his departure. He felt like one of his own characters in the pages of a finely written psychological novel.

The grass was wet underfoot and the misty rain teased his face. The way to the wood seemed long this evening, and already he was late for the tryst owing to the interruptions of that little minx Judy who had stood there arguing with him for nearly a quarter of an hour. Quinn, accustomed to homage and to feminine adulation, had been annoyed by her sharp little disdainful speeches, her air of pert curiosity as to his movements. He knew that he was in her eyes a "duffer" at golf, and that she was only reflecting the attitude of her brothers toward him. They despised novels, except of the adventurous kind, and were contemptuous of a man who spent his time in writing them and who, moreover, could not ride and disliked all forms of sport. Guy resented being judged by these bucolic standards as he would have stigmatized them, and he was beginning to think he should never care to set foot again inside the Park when his present visit came to an end. Lady Mercer was only delightful when separated from her children.

He raised his eyes and saw a wintry-looking Primavera standing on the outskirts of the Knoll, evidently awaiting him.

She wore a rough blue serge skirt, a knitted coat of some dull crimson silk that hung loosely in straight lines on her childish figure, a white blouse, and a little dark blue cap on her hair. Altogether an adorable picture.

"How charming of you to come on such a detestable day," he said in his softest voice.

"Oh, I don't mind weather. I always go out whether it's wet or fine," she said.

Guy took her ungloved hand in his.

"I had enormous difficulty in coming," he told

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her; "it was all I could do to prevent Judy from accompanying me *with all the dogs!* Those terrible, nerve-destroying dogs!"

Olave laughed outright.

"How you would have enjoyed your walk with Judy cracking her whip all the time and shouting *Heel!*" she said.

"Sooner than submit myself to such an experience I should have taken refuge again in that inclement north room of mine," he said. "But I was able to escape thanks to Lady Mercer who believes that I have a quite insatiable thirst for solitude."

"You must be thankful that Tom and Conrad are not there, they are ten times worse than Judy and Babs. If they were to find out about our picnic I should never hear the end of it."

"Ah, I am glad you see the necessity of keeping our own counsel," he said, making quick use of the opportunity afforded for improving the occasion. "If you were to tell your aunt, for instance, she might mention it to Lady Mercer, who repeats most things to Judy."

"But I really don't like the idea of not telling Aunt Aggie!" said Olave, looking straight in front of her with her beautiful, frank brown eyes. "It seems so deceitful and underhand, and as if I felt I had done something wrong."

"Sooner or later," said Guy carefully, "we all have to learn to lead our own lives. The first step often requires a little courage and determination. But the individual has rights, and in these days people are claiming more and more liberty. You are surely old enough now to judge for yourself what is right and what is wrong."

Quinn spread his mackintosh on the trunk of the fallen tree. They sat down beside each other. Olave still looked perplexed.

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"My own training was very strict," continued Guy; "it was a long time before I could make up my mind to set its absurd restrictions to one side."

"Aunt Aggie has always been like a mother to me," said Olave. She almost felt as if her aunt's kind, grave, wise eyes were watching her now. "When I was little she was always the one to scold or punish me. Not very often, of course, and so kindly. I could never bear to do anything she didn't approve of—anything I should have been afraid to tell her about."

"That is perfectly right and proper in a little child. But you are not a child any more."

There was silence then. They could hear the wind sweeping eerily across the tops of the trees. A soft light rain was still falling.

"You were not in church to-day," said Olave suddenly. "I half expected to see you there with the Mercers."

She was conscious of an eager curiosity to know the reason of his absence.

"No, I was not there," he said. Then he cleared his throat. "I am, or rather I ought to be, a Catholic," he added after a moment's hesitation. "I do not know if that conveys much to you, but that is how I was brought up and perhaps it will explain the restrictions I mentioned to you just now. My only sister is a nun."

Lately he had thought a great deal about his religion. The consideration of it had in a sense haunted him. It had cropped up with a strange insistence at the prospect of his marriage. He could hardly now understand why he had not been able to contemplate the idea of being married in any other church but his own, even to please Lady Trent and to remove the very slight obstacle that divided them.

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"Are you really a Catholic?" said Olave. She looked at him all at once as if he were mysterious. "I have never known one. I don't think it conveys anything to me at all."

"No?" said Guy. "I'm not a very good one, I'm afraid. My sister would tell you I am a very bad one. But I do myself the justice to believe that I am not so lost as she imagines." There was something hard and bitter in his tone which seemed to change for the moment his whole aspect.

Another silence followed, broken only by the steady drip-drip of the rain, splashing on the leaves overhead.

"When I go away I shall think of you very often," he said presently. "I shall think of all the beautiful hours we have spent together."

Olave colored.

"And you," he said, "shall you think of them, too?"

"I have an idea," she answered a little timidly, "that I shan't want to think of it very much. I shall, perhaps, be ashamed, unless I can summon up courage to tell Aunt Aggie."

It was the imposed secrecy that gave her so many scruples.

"Do not be ashamed," said Quinn; "you ought to be glad and proud that you had the courage to come."

Guy was sitting close to her and now he took her hand in his and found that it was cold and trembling. Olave tried to withdraw it but the effort was a feeble one and perished beneath the increased pressure of his grasp. In the little wood dusk was falling prematurely for the boughs were thickly interlaced overhead and the wan grey light had little strength to trickle through. As they sat there a heavy shower of rain began to descend. It was so violent that the great drops penetrated the branches and fell upon their heads, their clasped hands. Beyond the

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gap in the trees the long grey ridge of the wolds was obscurely delineated in the gathering gloom. There was something almost alarming to Olave in this suddenly falling premature darkness that was if a somber curtain had been drawn over the face of the sky. She could hear the sleepy twittering of birds, the raucous cawing of homing rooks, sounds that were accompanied by the steady continuous murmur of the rain. The little wood that had always seemed such a joyous familiar place, made increasingly dear to her now by the remembrance of those secret, stolen meetings, had been transformed in her imagination to a sinister haunt of fantastic, invisible presences, formless it is true but subtle and menacing. Instinctively she moved a little nearer to Quinn as if seeking the touch of human protection from a danger she could not define. Her hand clung to his now and she derived comfort from his proximity.

Quinn's face, set and rather stern, was very near her own, and they seemed to be suddenly alone in a wide and rather hostile world. Olave was imaginative and nervous, and the excitement and novelty of the adventure of the past few days had aroused within her a not uncommon apprehension for the future. Realizing something of the obscure distress that had assailed her Quinn slipped his arm round her and drew her closer to him. She yielded, and he felt that he was allaying those fears he could not understand. She did not speak and her face, quiet and passive but singularly pale, was turned toward his.

Guy, prompted by an impulse he regretted the next moment, bent his head and kissed her lips.

Olave looked up at him with startled eyes. She could not believe that they were still alone; she felt as if a hundred hostile witnesses were watching them with revengeful eyes.

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"Don't be afraid," said Guy very softly, and he repeated the embrace, this time with less scruple of conscience. He could feel that she trembled as she leaned against him. But she made no effort to move, to go away.

He had never intended to proceed to the lengths of actual love-making. But the figure of the woman he wished to marry had slipped away from him, had become vague. She had no part nor lot in the present hour. And the wildness of the elements, the savage lashing of the rain, the long moaning cry of the wind had stirred within him an emotion he did not stop to analyze. He, too, felt as if some bygone ancient tragedy still imbued the little wood with a haunting malaise. The gloom and darkness had driven Olave frightened into his arms. His touch had tranquilized her. Nature had been his powerful ally. As he looked down at her beautiful still face, cut with the delicacy of an old cameo, he was driven to ask himself if he loved her. For something told him very surely that weak and worthless and despicable as he was he had taught this child to love him.

Yes, love had come to Olave, like a strong, surging wave that could not be driven back. It seemed to enfold her, shutting out from her the danger of those wild and fierce elements that blew gusts of wind and thick showers of stinging, angry rain in their faces, and bringing to her heart a sense of satisfied peace and contentment such as she had never known before. She yielded to those repeated embraces with a surrender that was like obedience to a stronger force. Whispered broken words of love caressed her ear, for Guy had lost all restraining sense of prudence.

Olave could feel the wet grass soaking her strong boots; her soft crimson coat was like a limp rag, but she did not feel cold. And what did anything

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matter when she was listening to words of such wonderful and mysterious import?

"Primavera, I love you. Tell me that you love me."

"Of course I love you," she said.

The words were uttered so simply, with such evident truth, that Guy in spite of all things was startled and almost appalled by them.

"But I never knew for certain until now, until you kissed me," she went on in a low voice. "I didn't quite understand why I wanted to see you again so very much—why I was so afraid you might think it too wet to come."

Quinn cursed inwardly the grim fate that had thrust this lovely child across his path at, perhaps, the most critical moment of his life, when he had not only asked another woman to marry him but still believed himself to be passionately in love with that other woman. Had he not made a deliberate offer of his love to her, and was he not, even now, awaiting her reply with all the patience he could muster? In the face of that innocent confession of love to which he had just listened his sense of honor struck him a sharp and vigorous blow.

It stirred him to say:

"Primavera, are you brave? Can you bear the truth?"

"I feel I can bear anything now," she answered, and her trustful, happy look of complete confidence smote him to the heart.

"I have no right to ask you whether you love me," he said. "I have no right to speak of love to you at all."

She drew a little away from him, and with a movement that seemed to hold something of conscious effort she dragged herself to her feet.

"I am going to be married," he said quietly; "that is, I have asked a woman to marry me. I am not

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actually engaged because I am still waiting for her answer."

"But you love her?" said Olave, stupefied.

She was instinctively shamed by his words. He had made her believe that he loved her, only to tell her that he loved someone else.

Guy did not answer. He was aghast to find that he actually experienced some difficulty in replying in the affirmative to her question. Had he burned his own fingers as well as hers? Until then he had never doubted his own love for Felicity Trent.

"I believed that I loved her very much when I asked her to marry me," he said at last, with an evasion that did not escape her.

"Then it wasn't true—what you said just now—about loving me?" she asked. She jerked out the words between sobs that threatened to choke her.

"Oh, don't, don't cry, Primavera," he entreated, drawing her to him and kissing again the troubled, sorrowful face with a renewed tenderness evoked by her grief. "It has all been a most horrible mistake; I ought never to have asked you to meet me here at all. But you were such an adorable child."

His words quieted her a little and dispelled that hot sense of anger that had suddenly possessed her. The first violence of her emotion had spent itself, leaving her almost exhausted. She could not understand him, but one fact emerged from the general confusion which was that in some way he did really love her, although she had come too late and an unknown "shadowy third" stood between them.

"You must not cry," he said. "I am not worth one of your tears. But when I go back to London I will light a candle at the altar of Our Lady, and I shall pray that you may be comforted and that some day you may receive a love far more worthy than mine."

She stood there in front of him now—a slim,

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appealing figure, very beautiful in her distress, her eyes sparkling like jewels with the bright tears still filling them. She was shivering now with cold. She could not understand why she suddenly felt so cold; her very heart seemed chilled. She was conscious, too, of her bedraggled appearance, her soaking boots, and felt as if she must present rather a demoralized aspect.

"But I must see you once more, darling Primavera," said Guy. "I shall be here to-morrow wet or fine. And you must positively come. I expect to return to London on Tuesday or Wednesday."

"I will come," said the girl tonelessly; "it can not matter, it will be for the last time."

"You're not afraid to go home? It's getting quite dark."

"No, I'm not at all afraid."

What did anything matter now?

There was something in her face then that did definitely remind him of Felicity Trent. It was an obscure, indeterminate resemblance that must certainly be the fruit of his own imagination. Yet was not his very perfidy sufficient to evoke the reproachful ghost of Felicity?

With folded arms he stood and watched Olave as she ran down the hill and was quickly lost to sight in the gathering darkness.

CHAPTER VII

ILLNESS OF OLAVE

ELUDING vigilance on his return, Guy Quinn went straight up to his room to remove his soaked clothes and boots, and to dress for dinner. On his writing-table he saw a little heap of letters; he re-

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membered that they always arrived late on Sundays. There was no proper delivery and one of the servants had to go over to Cheldon to fetch them. He took them up idly, he was not thinking of Felicity just then, and the sight of her pretty graceful writing made the blood rush to his face. So he was to know his fate at last. As he sat there with the unopened letter in his hand he tried to search his heart and to discover exactly what he wished the contents of that letter to be.

A week ago—four days ago—with what impatient eagerness had he longed for it, distracted and tormented by alternations of hope and fear. And now, had everything changed? Had this child taken his life into her two little brown hands? He was looking again into those dark eyes half-drowned in their own tears. And now he was to learn at last whether he were a free man or a bound.

He realized that in that insensate philandering of his he had not escaped a wound. He tore open the letter at last with an almost savage gesture.

Felicity Trent accepted his offer of marriage, accepted it with all the conditions that were essential to a mixed marriage. She wrote from an address in Devonshire where she was staying, she informed him, with her sister. The letter was brief and rather cold. She added at the ending, "I am sending this letter to London as you do not tell me where you are staying in the country."

He was thankful to feel that he had not revealed his whereabouts to her. Now he need never do so. He would shake the dust of Cheldon from his feet and never refer again to his sojourn in that ill-fated locality. He was glad to think that she had no clue as to where he had spent this last golden week of his freedom. It should belong, always and only, to himself and little Primavera.

Because the evening was so wet and chilly a

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thoughtful housemaid had lit a fire in Quinn's room. And into that fire with foolish, impulsive petulance Guy Quinn flung Felicity Trent's letter. It is doubtful if many letters of similar purport have met with so summary a fate.

He looked so haggard at dinner that night that he excited the compassion of Lady Mercer.

"I hope you haven't caught cold," she said, struck by his silence which had been noticeable even across the persistent chattering of Judy and Babs.

She looked in her sympathetic way at his pale rather distraught countenance, and wondered if he were feeling ill or if he were worried about his work. Probably like all clever men he had been overworking lately and was suffering in consequence from nerves.

Lady Mercer had no nerves herself, but she was immensely solicitous about them in other people, especially in charming, attractive, and artistic young men to whom she liked to think she played the rôle of an attentive and encouraging Egeria.

"I think you have been overdoing it," she said, in her gentle, maternal way which Judy was wont to call irreverently "soothing-syrup." "Perhaps you have overtired yourself with these immensely long walks. If I were you, I should take a good rest when you have finished this new book. A real rest in pleasant surroundings with nice people and nothing to do!"

Judy stifled an ill-suppressed giggle. "And no dogs!" she subjoined, in a loud whisper.

He assented gloomily, taking no notice of Judy's interpolation.

"It was imprudent to stay out so late on such a wet evening," continued Lady Mercer. "Judy tells me that she saw you come in at a quarter to eight. You must have been wet through, and this is such a damp penetrating rain."

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So Judy had been spying!

"Oh, I never mind rain. Damp doesn't hurt me," he said in an abstracted manner. He longed to say that he would soon have to go back to London; he wished he had the courage to fix his departure for the following morning. It would be far wiser, even far kinder, to go away without seeing Primavera again. But he knew that to-morrow evening would find him once more in the green fastness of the little wood.

"You must know all the walks by heart. Which way did you go this evening? We saw you going out at the north lodge. Babs and I always think that's the dullest way of all unless you want to take the short cut to the Manor," said Judy.

"I have never been to the Manor," said Guy.

"They're all away now except Olave," said Judy.

"We ought to have had her over to tea," said Lady Mercer. "It must be so dull for her alone with Mademoiselle."

Olave? He pricked up his ears at the name. But no, it was absurd to imagine that they were speaking of Primavera. His thoughts were so full of her that his imagination was bound to play tricks of the kind. Oh, it was high time he went away.

On the following morning he sought out Lady Mercer at an hour when he rightly conjectured that he should find her alone. She was always at her best when not surrounded by her noisy family with their boisterous and unruly dogs.

"I find I shall have to go back to London early to-morrow," he announced. "I have all sorts of worrying letters and I must go up to see to things."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," said Lady Mercer. "I feel you ought to stay a week longer at least. Our Cotswold air is often trying at first but you feel the benefit later."

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She was struck afresh by his pale distraught look.

"You are always so kind and thoughtful," he said, "and if I could only have had a few more days at Cheldon I feel I should be a different man."

"I hope you won't venture out to-day, it is so very wet again," she said. "The Gloucestershire mud is proverbial and you would find it very disagreeable walking. I am sorry you do not care about the motor, but really there is not much pleasure in going out in it in the rain, and I know you dislike paying visits."

Guy made no reply. His eyes surveyed those wet clouds that were traveling swiftly over the grey wolds. He could hear the steady splashing of the rain on the trees and bushes outside the window. It seemed to him that nature was weeping—weeping for the tears he had brought to those young eyes which until yesterday had been so bright, so unsorrowing. Yet through it all there was something most delicately sweet in the thought that those tears had been shed for him. In all his experience he had never aroused so swift and eager and fresh an emotion. How he could have taught and trained her in her youth and innocence. How he could have loved her, with a tender and chivalrous devotion. He put these thoughts roughly from him. He would go away and never, if he could help it, think of her again. Of course it would be easy to forget a girl he had only seen three or four times. The impression she had made upon him could not be lasting. But just now because he knew that she was out of his reach he dwelt upon her in his thoughts with a wistful sense of loss, not without pain. The adventure had been so wonderful. It had all been so different from anything he had hitherto known. His life was spent for the most part in conventional scenes among sophisticated people, rich,

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luxurious, cultivated. And Primavera had been as fresh and unspoiled as the Cotswold Hills that enfolded her young life. She had been too simple to have any thought of hiding the emotion he had awakened in her heart. The knowledge had touched him profoundly. He felt he would like to watch her beautiful development. There was madness in this contemplation of her; Felicity Trent should have filled all his thoughts.

Lady Mercer's slow, charming voice interrupted him.

"I'm always hoping to hear that you are going to be married," she said. "You need someone to smooth the path for you."

"We authors are supposed to be like Carlyle 'gey ill to live with,' you know," he said ironically.

"But if you could meet the right woman," she said hesitatingly.

It would have been the psychological moment for him to inform Lady Mercer of his engagement to Felicity Trent but he could not bring himself to speak of it. She would be certain to detect some lack of enthusiasm in his tone and, perhaps, be led to imagine that he had deliberately planned a worldly marriage with a rich woman older than himself. He felt that he did not look like a man who was engaged in a prosperous and happy love-affair. No, he could not bring himself to utter Felicity's name this morning. Some day when he had gone back to London he would write and tell her of his approaching marriage.

He was too selfish to forego the bitter-sweetness of a last interview with Primavera. In spite of Lady Mercer's anxiety to keep him indoors in such bad weather, he started off for the wood directly after tea, thankful to be able to make his escape easily and without questioning.

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He arrived there too early, and he strolled about the wet hillside beyond the Knoll for quite half an hour. The sharp sting of the rain beat upon his face and a keen easterly wind chilled him to the bone. It was indeed a wintry June.

When he looked at his watch he saw that it was already half past six, and there was so far no sign of Primavera. At first he amused himself by rehearsing his own part in the approaching interview. It was as well to have some deliberate plan for he had to make confession now of his actual engagement. She must learn that there was nothing before them but irremediable parting. He saw himself as one of the principal actors in a drama which he would like to have written. The *décor* of the little wood was not inharmonious as a setting. If she wept he would console her; he would soothe her grief by assuring her of his own. She must not go away from him bitter and disillusioned. He must not leave her with any impression of perfidy. He framed noble phrases of renunciation, calm, brave words about the call of honor. She was too young, too ignorant of the world not to accept them at their face value. She would still believe him to be a knight *sans peur et sans reproche.*

Still, she did not come. Perhaps she had rudely awakened to the kind of knowledge he would have wished to keep from her. He was to have no last chance to rehabilitate himself in her eyes. She saw him perhaps as he was—a man who had deliberately made love to a young girl, obviously ignorant of the rules of the game, while actually engaged to another woman. The plain truth when thus presented by himself, shocked Guy a little. More desperately than ever did he long to see her. And at first he could not bring himself to believe that she had actually failed him. It was nearly

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eight o'clock when at last he emerged from the dusk of the wood and began to make his way back to the Park. An unreasoning anger and resentment against her quickly chased away any slight misgiving he might have felt with regard to her non-appearance. She had deprived him of the last and culminating scene of the sentimental adventure, of those final kisses which should have been theirs. He had meant to make it all so beautiful, to salve his own conscience, to put himself in the right with specious words. And she had not come! She had let him wait there for her for nearly two hours under the most horrible conditions.

Guy Quinn had been spoiled by women. It was perhaps the natural fate of a young good-looking, brilliantly successful man. He was little accustomed, therefore, to capricious treatment at their hands. Sullenly he moved away and returned to the Park, mortified, fatigued, and dispirited.

He was almost late for dinner. But he made a very hasty toilet in his endeavor to appear with sufficient punctuality to escape Judy's remorseless chafing questions. She was a little terror, that girl, and he was guilty enough to feel actually afraid of her. But all these careful plans were entirely wasted, for on entering the drawing-room he found it empty. There was no sign of Lady Mercer. Babs was the first to appear, and Babs, without Judy to inspire her, was a comparatively harmless little person. Judy's advent was not, however, greatly delayed. A shrill yelping in the hall, the sound of a smart, determined smack followed by a melancholy canine protest heralded her approach. She came into the room followed by a mixed pack of white Highland terriers, Pekingese, and a solitary, elderly black pug of profoundly pessimistic mien.

"Down dogs!" said Judy, whose attempts at dis-

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cipline were always quickly forgotten, "you know Mr. Quinn hates you all. Dinner's late, but you mustn't mind. It was put off on mother's account, but she's just telephoned to say she won't be back to-night. And, of course, there was some very special soothing syrup for you, to say how dreadfully sorry she was not to be here and on your last evening, too." She imitated her mother's gentle anxious voice to perfection as she thus addressed Guy.

Quinn looked volumes of unspoken disapproval at this flagrant impertinence; his fingers tingled to box her ears.

Judy, as if unaware of the unfavorable impression she was producing, continued in the same satirical strain:

"Isn't it a mercy we've no one coming to dinner this evening? Although I do pity you, Mr. Quinn, for having to be dependent upon Babs and me for your intellectual entertainment!"

"Where has your mother gone?" inquired Quinn, resentful of this treatment on the part of Lady Mercer, following so swiftly upon his recent disappointment.

"Didn't you hear about it? Oh, no, of course you had just gone off on one of your interminable walks! How you *can!*" said Judy. "And not even a dog for company! Well, after you had started—we tried to run after you but you'd quite disappeared—as I say after you'd started Mademoiselle telephoned from the Manor to say that Olave was really ill and she was frightened—she's a nervous Frenchwoman you know—and she begged mother to go over there. She went over at once in the motor to see what was happening, but she must have found it as bad as they said for she doesn't like to leave her till Olave's mother comes back."

"The doctor says it's pneumonia," chimed in Babs;

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"she was taken very ill suddenly last night. Why, we saw her in church yesterday, she looked as fit as a fiddle then!"

"And who is Olave?" inquired Guy, with a curious sinking sensation in the region of his heart.

"Oh, she's the girl at the Manor," replied Judy carelessly; "she is really quite a pal of ours, though we think her rather a muff. The boys like her for she's quite a decent sort, only, you know, she's been properly brought up!"

She screwed up her short nose as she said this. The grimace was, however, lost upon Guy.

"I hope Olave isn't going to die," said Babs, beginning to look tearful at the bare idea of such a melancholy contingency.

"Die? Tosh! Of course she isn't going to die," said Judy contemptuously; "why she's younger than I am!"

"People younger than you do die though, Judy," said Babs, restraining her tears now with an effort. "There was Mrs. Barker's little girl, she was only nine!"

"Bother Mrs. Barker's little girl!" promptly responded Judy; "let us go and have some dinner. Mr. Quinn must be starving after his long walk!"

Throughout the meal Judy, who always enjoyed "holding the floor," kept up a chattering monologue which harassed Guy's already over-wrought nerves. But something in his gloomy and pre-occupied silence to-night restrained her from attacking him with any of her sharp and personal sallies.

"He's bored at having to dine alone with us," she thought to herself; "that's why he's so glum."

"When do you think your mother will come back?" was almost his only question. "I'm afraid I must leave by the early train."

"It depends upon when Olave's mother can get there. Her aunt, too, is away from home, and we

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all think her aunt really cares about her more than her mother does."

The words, carelessly spoken as they were, did arouse all Quinn's formless, shapeless fears and intensify them a hundredfold. Olave—Olave had been taken suddenly ill, and her aunt was away from home. Her aunt who really cared about her more than her mother did. What connection could there be, in Heaven's name, between this unknown Olave who was ill and Primavera who had failed so unaccountably to meet him in the wood this evening? Oh, it was surely ridiculous to suppose that there could be any link between the two! Such coincidences belonged to the third-rate novel or to the absurdities of transpontine melodrama, rather than to real life. And yet—and yet—his heart sank afresh as he pondered over those slight and careless scraps of information vouchsafed by Judy. To do her justice she would have been quite ready to talk more of Olave had he displayed the slightest interest in the subject. But judging from his gloomy face and morose silence she imagined that it bored him to hear about this girl who was ill, and who was the innocent cause of Lady Mercer's absence.

Quinn said at last, almost with an effort:

"Where do these people live?"

"Oh, it's quite three miles away by the road," said Judy, "but from house to house it isn't more than two, if you go out at the north lodge and take the short cut. You cross the road and climb a stile and go up to the top of the hill where there's a wood called Ardern's Knoll. People here say there's something unlucky about the place, some of them believe that it's haunted. Olave always uses that short cut when she comes here. Aren't you feeling well, Mr. Quinn? You are looking a bit white about the gills!"

He pulled himself together.

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"I hate this wet weather," he said petulantly; "it isn't a bit like the middle of June. It's enough to give anyone pneumonia!"

"It's a pity you have never met Olave here," said Judy good-naturedly; "you'd like her, she's just your sort. Not a bit pretty, of course, but so quiet and well-behaved and never rude or cheeky. She isn't a horrid pert girl like me and she's much more intelligent than Babs! I really believe you'd get on like a house on fire!"

Quinn repressed with difficulty a sarcastic answer. He was thankful when the meal came to an end and he could escape to his own room.

CHAPTER VIII

MISS ARDERN'S DISCOVERIES

QUINN did not see Lady Mercer again before his departure which took place early on the following morning. He left a note for her, expressing his regret that he was obliged to go, and adding a hope that her little patient was better.

There was no particular reason why he should remain at Cheldon, and there was certainly every good reason why a man so recently engaged should return to London to meet his *fiancée* who had mentioned that she expected to arrive at Waverton Street during the course of the day.

He had no means of discovering if Olave and his little Primavera were indeed one and the same person, but felt depressed and anxious when he left Cheldon that day. Judy, whom he saw for a moment, informed him that the news was not reassuring this morning. Olave had had a bad night and

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Lady Mercer couldn't leave her even to go to the telephone.

He called at Waverton Street during the course of the afternoon only to hear that Felicity had not returned. She had telegraphed to say that she was unexpectedly detained and did not expect to be in London till the end of the week. Guy walked away from the house with the melancholy impression that he had been deserted by everyone. Primavera, Lady Mercer, and now Felicity Trent had each in their turn failed him.

He had a small flat in Jermyn Street, and it was his habit to stay there whenever he was in London. Guy had furnished these rooms with great taste, and many beautiful and precious objects acquired in his yearly wanderings were to be seen there. He had fancies, too, for odd schemes of color and curious decorations.

He was restless and yet he felt disinclined to do anything. He rejected the thought of dining at his club and subsequently going to the play. What was Felicity doing? Why had she not returned to London? Why was everything going so suddenly awry as if by some preconceived perversity? By the last delivery he received a letter from Lady Trent which only served to deepen his gloom.

"Dear Guy," it ran, "I am so sorry that after all I shall not be able to return to town to-day. But I have just heard that my poor little girl is very ill and we are going home at once. It's the first time she's ever been really ill, and it has made me feel as if my maternal heart were less hard and indifferent than I have always imagined it to be. One lives and learns." She signed it simply *Felicity*. The letter was not dated and she had curiously enough omitted to give him any address.

How careless she was. She must have written

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the letter in a great hurry. Was all the world then afflicted to-day with sick daughters and sick nieces? He need not have hurried back to London on Lady Trent's account after all. He resentfully reflected that she was still treating the bond between them as a slender thing that hardly held her at all. He began to wish he had remained at Cheldon for at least a couple of days longer to learn how the mysterious Olave was progressing. Perhaps another visit to the Knoll, another meeting with Primavera, would have relieved his anxiety and assured him that the two girls were not identical. He longed quite savagely to be back at the Park, Judy and the chilly north bedroom notwithstanding. If he had been a more ardent and less pre-occupied lover he would have gone round to Waverton Street and inquired for Lady Trent's present address. But happily—or rather unhappily—this idea did not occur to him. He would have been bewildered and even aghast to discover that her daughter lay ill at Nether Cheldon Manor.

So far he had never heard the name of Cheldon in reference to Felicity, and it would have conveyed a sense at least of ill-omen had he done so now for the first time. He sat down and wrote a little note, sufficiently sympathetic, sufficiently cordial, and addressed it to Waverton Street, posting it the next time he went out.

On his table lay the still unfinished typescript of his new novel. The final chapters were still wanting —those very chapters he had hoped to finish during his visit to the Mercers. There was a letter, too, from his publishers asking when they might expect the book. This polite reminder of the unusual delay exasperated Guy. He felt less like completing it now than he had ever done. It was always a mistake to break off in the middle of a novel; it was so

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seldom that one could recapture its exact atmosphere. Almost always, too, it showed a cicatrice, betraying the infusion of those new influences that had assailed the author during the interval. Cheldon had taken him wholly away from his accustomed world, had given him a new set of thoughts and ideas utterly at variance with the old ones. It had stirred within him a wish to be more in accordance with Primavera's innocent opinion of him. When he had spoken to her of praying he knew he had been perfectly sincere. He would have liked to kneel beside her in the deep and rich gloom of a Catholic church. He would have liked to watch the effect of it upon her. He would like to have taught her those very lessons he had tried to forget. His successful, worldly, brilliant life had little by little taken him completely away from that early teaching. But when he had been with the girl he had felt he would like her to possess those very gifts he had consciously rejected.

He had never had that desire for Felicity. She could go her own way in the matter of religion although a sense of honor had prompted him to make —even to her—certain definite stipulations.

He turned over the pages of his typescript. His intense care for his work had made him always, if possible, avoid any such violent and prolonged break in the completion of a book. But since he had begun this one he had been immensely disturbed by two people who had come abruptly and without warning into his life. And he had not realized until now, when he was confronted with his unfinished work, how gravely Primavera had interrupted him.

He wanted to write something for her—a wonderful book, fresh with the wild sweet air of the Western hills. He was sick of those gay cosmopolitan scenes wherein brilliant sophisticated men and

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women played their complicated parts, and to which he had hitherto almost exclusively devoted his talent. Now he felt the need of something simpler, nearer to nature. He put down the sheets of typescript and sighed.

Meanwhile, down at Cheldon, Olave Trent was raving of strange things. Of picnics, of meetings in the wood, of love, of parting. It made Agnes Ardern's heart sink with an anxiety that was not at all connected with the fact that her niece was seriously, even dangerously, ill.

Agnes had returned to the Manor with her sister late on the afternoon of Guy's departure from Cheldon. She persuaded Lady Mercer to go home to rest and at once assumed command of the sick-room. Olave was then lying in a kind of stupor; there was not much to be done, and even Felicity was induced to go to her room after dinner and to lie down.

As the night wore on Olave became delirious, and her ravings assumed the nature above indicated. Agnes sat there listening to the strange, passionate monologue to which she had no key. Issuing from lips whose utterances were no longer controlled by the brain, they yet pointed to an experience of which Agnes had no cognizance.

Once, however, Olave paused in the midst of her delirium, and gazing at her with wild, unseeing eyes that seemed to be fixed intently upon some person or object that she imagined to be present, she said slowly and with great earnestness:

"Oh, I promise never, *never* to tell Aunt Aggie!"

Miss Ardern, alarmed at this complication, did her best to keep Felicity out of the room during the greater part of the night when the delirium was at its worst. The second night Olave grew quiet and the doctor announced a grave crisis in her illness.

It was then that Agnes Ardern felt that she had

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always utterly misread the characters of the two people whom she had regarded as her nearest, dearest, and most intimate fellow-creatures.

Olave, smitten with sudden illness, hovering between life and death, spoke as long as she had strength to speak at all of a man whose name—safeguarded perhaps by some mysterious reticence that ruled her subconsciously even in delirium—never once passed her lips. But she left no room for doubt in Agnes Ardern's mind that despite the strict vigilance that had surrounded her—unnecessarily strict as Lady Trent had sometimes held it to be—Olave had, in some inexplicable way, learned the meaning of love, had known something of its joy and a measure of its sorrow. When and where and how had she met and conversed with any man who had fallen in love, as she seemed in her wild utterances to indicate, with her fresh and girlish beauty and taught her to respond to that love? There was no one in the neighborhood with whom she was at all on intimate terms of friendship. Beyond the boisterous Mercer family with its little crowd of noisy merry girls and boys, Olave had no friends and but few acquaintances. And as Miss Ardern watched and listened she felt a fierce resentment against this unknown person who had stolen a march upon her, had mocked perhaps at her simple precautions and eluded her careful vigilance.

She had promised never, never to tell Aunt Aggie. Miss Ardern's heart sank. But there was another utterance that because of its strangeness haunted her still more persistently: *"You won't forget, will you, to pray for me? To light a candle at Our Lady's altar, for me, as you said you would."*

Hardly less mysterious and unaccountable to her was the attitude of Lady Trent during the days of tormenting anxiety that followed. When the doc-

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tor's grave face and demand for a consultation indicated the existence of a danger he hardly dared put into words, Felicity entered her daughter's room with white stony face and refused again to leave it. It seemed to Agnes Ardern that all her sister's repressed maternal feeling had been sharply and rudely awakened. For sixteen years she had neglected and almost disliked Olave, now she marched into her little kingdom and took possession of crown and scepter like a monarch who, having abdicated from motives of indolent indifference, returns to rule over his country in a time of stress and need, deposing thereby a faithful regent. Agnes Ardern's claims were thrust aside, and she had to give way for the first time before the superior rights of Olave's mother. To her it was a bewildering phase, obscuring and confusing her own position. She was not jealous, but she was far too human not to feel a little hurt at the quiet, yet decided, way in which Felicity deposed her and took up the reins of government. Mercifully by the time this happened Olave's fever had diminished; she was no longer delirious, but lay there utterly exhausted and spent. She took no notice of those around her and rarely opened her eyes.

Lady Trent's fierce anxiety was largely mixed with remorse. All her past indifference to her child rose up to accuse her. If Olave died she knew that it would always seem to her as a heavy but well-merited punishment, for all that neglect, that want of love, that persistent shifting of natural responsibilities and duty upon her sister's shoulders.

Felicity had long been unused to pain of any kind. She had not for many years known what it was to be unhappy or anxious. And her present pain made her feel rebellious and angry. It forced her also to seek a scape-goat, and she swiftly found one in Agnes Ardern. Why had Agnes encouraged her to

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neglect her daughter? Why had she not utterly refused from the first to take sole charge of Olave in this way? Why had she not pointed out her duty to Felicity? Why had she, without a word of remonstrance, assumed control of that young life, relieving the mother of her natural task? Why had she, above all, continued to bestow such a wealth of love and unwearying care and devotion upon Olave that the girl had never even missed nor wanted the mother-love that was her inalienable right and of which she had been so unnaturally deprived? Lady Trent was determined that Agnes should share the blame, just as she was most inevitably sharing the punishment. She knew from her sister's worn and ravaged countenance, that looked incredibly old after her all-night vigil, that she, too, was feeling the sharp pain of the scourge that had descended upon them. True, her sorrow could scarcely be mixed with this awful heart-breaking contrition and remorse; one could not say that she had ever wilfully neglected nor shirked any part of her duty, but she would certainly suffer horribly if anything should happen to Olave. Yet, if Lady Trent could have penetrated into the recesses of her sister's mind she would have found amid its confused bewilderment a remorse scarcely less deep than her own. For had not each one of Olave's shrill, delirious utterances held a separate indictment of unwitting but very culpable negligence?

Lady Trent's contrition was perfectly genuine. She made a resolve that if Olave were spared to her she would abrogate no more the least part of her maternal duty. Olave should live with her, should be her daughter not only in name. Olave should share her new home. Quinn must be told of the change. Hitherto he had heard little of Olave, but he must have guessed her dislike to being burdened with a young daughter.

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Although Felicity was in love with the man whose wife she had promised to be, that love had for the moment taken a secondary place in her life. She had little leisure to think of him. She did not in the least wish for his presence at Cheldon. Her absorption in her child was complete. Sometimes it almost seemed to Agnes that the mother—this new, tender, and loving mother—was actually fighting for her daughter's life and was becoming spent and exhausted in the protracted struggle.

Olave, the daughter, now occupied the position of first importance in Lady's Trent's life. Agnes and Quinn had fallen into secondary places, had descended, as it were, to a lower rung. Lady Trent even felt that if she had been compelled to choose between Olave and Quinn, she would unhesitatingly have chosen Olave. It was a case of repressed and exiled Nature returning hot-foot to claim her rights with a vigor born of that past outrage.

Sometimes, in the dim shadows of that hushed room, Felicity Trent would glance across at her sister and wonder if behind that pale and haggard face there was any suspicion of what was passing in her own mind.

Olave had in a certain sense filled the place Felicity had herself occupied for so many years in Agnes Ardern's life, even if she had not quite succeeded in occupying the same place in her affections. The care and devotion Agnes had given to the mother had been transferred, as the exigencies of the situation demanded, to the daughter. One had simply succeeded the other. Strong, conscientious, and affectionate, Agnes had thus spent the best years of her life in fulfilling the duties that had been in this way thrust upon her. And her experience with her sister had made her a singularly competent guardian for Olave. To take Olave away from her now would assuredly inflict a grievous wound upon her heart,

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in spite of the stern words she had so recently spoken to Felicity concerning her neglected duty. Lady Trent set her lips as these thoughts passed through her mind. But no consideration for her sister's feelings, she now promised herself, should prevent her from taking complete possession of Olave in the future. And then she would look at Olave, lying white and shrunken in an exhausted sleep that closely imitated death, and all plans and hopes for her future seemed to perish immediately. Surely Olave could not recover—surely she must be going to die! Lady Trent choked back a sob. It was part of her punishment that she should lose her child just in the hour when she had come to learn the precious worth, the inestimable dearness, of such a possession.

Days dragged past, and still the Manor House at Nether Cheldon was hushed into an awestruck and expectant silence. The visit of a celebrated physician from London did little to relieve their anxiety. It seemed as if Olave's weakness slowly but surely increased. Lady Trent emerged from that prolonged ordeal a changed woman. Something of that glancing brightness of hers seemed to have been destroyed forever. Quinn's letters were thrust aside almost unread. They were still forwarded from Waverton Street for Felicity had never written to him to tell him where she was. All the future—the dreadful future without Olave—would belong to Guy Quinn. She could not write love-letters now. Her supreme pre-occupation forced Quinn into the background, making of him a dim rather indistinct figure. And into his own missives there had crept a kind of restraint which she attributed to a fear on his part of intruding upon her anxiety.

Miss Ardern, whose life had been spent for the most part in a singular freedom from complicated questions and difficult psychological problems, was alarmed at the possibilities offered by the new Felic-

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ity and the new Olave—these two people whom she had known so intimately and who she now felt were both complete strangers to her.

When the doctor first informed them that actual danger was past and there was every reason to hope for a complete recovery, Lady Trent fainted away. She had never fainted in her life before, and the incident seemed to give the precise measure of all she had so calmly endured. Agnes helped to put her to bed, fearing that she would fall ill from the effects of the protracted strain. Having done this she returned to her post by Olave's bedside, almost thankful to be relieved temporarily from that mute, pathetic presence.

This sudden display of relief and emotion on the part of her sister had taught Miss Ardern that Felicity's maternal solicitude was no pose but a genuine and deep feeling tardily awakened to life by an unexpected anxiety. She wondered how far it would affect their three lives in the future. The revelation, so little in accord with all that had gone before between mother and daughter, was a somewhat baffling one. It remained to be seen how Olave would correspond to this new change.

For that was, in Miss Ardern's private opinion, exactly where the great difficulty would lie.

CHAPTER IX

LADY TRENT TURNS OVER A NEW LEAF

ONE hot breathless evening in July Olave's weak voice called Miss Ardern to the bedside.

"Aunt Aggie."

"Yes, darling."

"Who was that here just now?"

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"Your mother, dear. She isn't very well, she can't stay with you as much as she would wish. But if you like I can call her—"

Olave moved restlessly.

"No, no. I don't want her. Don't let her come."

Her voice sounded both weak and petulant.

"Hush, dear." The gentle little reproof rose to Miss Ardern's lips quite naturally. "She has been very anxious, she has made herself quite ill nursing you."

She looked attentively at Olave, but she could see that the information produced no softening of the hard expression which made the childish face look oddly determined and even stern.

"I don't want her. I'd rather you stayed with me."

Had Felicity returned too late to compel loyalty and obedience in her new kingdom? Would she fail to gather up the broken threads she had herself cut so carelessly? It was no time to rebuke Olave, she was still far too weak for that, but into Miss Ardern's heart there crept a faint sense of triumph which she immediately repulsed as an unworthy and dangerous sentiment. She saw clearly that Felicity's passionate maternal solicitude had quite failed to evoke any filial response from Olave, bound by the old tradition, alienated by the consistent neglect of years.

Yet, what did she herself know of Olave? The girl was an enigma to her. She lived a secret, hidden life of which Miss Ardern knew nothing at all—whose existence she had indeed discovered by a mere accident. A life that held an unknown, premature, but passionate love. She felt that she was speaking to a stranger.

"My dear child, my dear child—" she said suddenly, with pity in her voice.

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Olave lay back on the pillow and closed her eyes. She was exhausted by the brief conversation.

A heat wave passed over England that year. Even on the Cotswolds it held the country in its red-hot grip. Burning days of blistering sunshine succeeded each other in apparently endless procession. Lady Trent found the heat trying; she flagged a little, and sometimes spoke of going to the seashore directly Olave could be moved. But the girl's convalescence promised to be a long one.

Felicity quickly perceived that her presence in the sick-room disturbed and agitated Olave, now that she was conscious of it. This knowledge pierced her heart like a sword. Olave was uncommunicative when she spoke to her, sometimes even becoming flushed and excited. This attitude, while it was disconcerting at first, aroused all Felicity's latent obstinacy. She had always had her own way, and she intended to have it now. She made light to herself of the puny rebellion. Olave must be won—away from Aggie. That was, to put it crudely, exactly how the matter stood. And Felicity felt certain that she would in time succeed. She knew enough of her own powers of attraction and fascination to be quite sure that in the long run Olave would not be able to resist them. She almost foresaw the day when Olave would become a humble adoring little slave. Felicity, like most charming and beautiful young women, had sometimes met with that kind of simple adoration from young girls, and if it had bored her it had at least slightly flattered her.

But she was very far away from making that sort of impression upon her own daughter during those first days of Olave's convalescence at Cheldon.

"Have I been very ill, Aunt Aggie?" said Olave in a feeble voice.

She had been moved for the first time on to the

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sofa which was drawn up close to the open window. Her eyes that now looked rather too large for her face were fixed intently upon the trees of Ardern's Knoll outlined in dark blots against the clear blue of the sky.

"Yes, dear, you have been very ill," said Miss Ardern. "I think you must have been imprudent while we were away in Devonshire. Mademoiselle told me that once or twice you stayed out very late in the rain."

"I did get my feet very wet one day," said Olave flushing deeply. "And I stayed out rather late in the rain that last Sunday evening. I don't remember much that happened after that, except feeling very ill in the night."

She looked puzzled.

"Where did you go to so late in the rain?" inquired Miss Ardern.

"I walked up to the Knoll," said Olave quickly.

"Alone?"

"Yes." There was a faint, scarcely perceptible, hestitation about her answer. Something in her look of distress warned Agnes that she was approaching dangerous ground. The veil must be lifted delicately; she could not rudely force that young confidence.

"Don't let mother scold me for getting ill like this," said Olave presently.

"She isn't likely to scold you, dear. It was hardly your own fault."

"She might think it was if she knew that I stayed out late in the rain."

"Well, I'm sure you won't be so foolish another time." Miss Ardern's voice was brisk and held a touch of wholesome assurance.

Olave lay back on the cushions turning her face from the light. Her black hair lay like fine silk

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against the white background. She could not, as she had just informed her aunt, remember very clearly the events that had immediately preceded her illness. She could only recall the fact that she had felt very strange and hot, and that she had talked loudly when she had no intention of talking at all, and that all the time her head had felt enormously large and light. Also the face of the man she had met in Ardern's Knoll had constantly come and gone before her eyes. Once, remembering that he would be waiting for her out there in the rain and chill of a dusky summer evening wondering, perhaps, why she did not come, she had tried to get up and go to him; she had a hazy recollection of struggling with someone—the doctor, perhaps—who had tried to restrain her.

It seemed to Miss Ardern that Olave had changed. It was not only the change brought about by physical suffering but rather a change in the girl herself. Something fresh and vital had penetrated into her life, influencing it powerfully. It had destroyed, too, the perfect frankness of Olave. Miss Ardern felt convinced that the girl had a secret from her, and that her instinct was to guard it from untoward exposure. She seemed indeed to be ever on the alert to protect it. But Miss Ardern had no wish to surprise it, or to entrap her niece into a confession. She was aware that her first attempt to obtain some precise knowledge of Olave's movements during her absence had produced distress and confusion, so she determined to wait until the girl was stronger and then quietly, but firmly, to demand the whole truth from her. It was obviously her duty to do this, and she had every intention of performing the task herself and not of relegating it to Felicity. Miss Ardern plainly perceived that there were disagreeable moments ahead of her, but she was too strict and conscientious a woman not to do her utmost to

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remove Olave from a situation that might prove as dangerous and disastrous to her as that old clandestine love-affair had proved in the past to Lady Trent. Had she not seen her sister's youth wrecked upon those very shoals? She was prepared, therefore, to combat that new influence which had crept unperceived into Olave's life. Even if it caused the girl acute suffering in the present Miss Ardern knew that she must fulfil her task with unaltered persistence and even severity.

When Lady Trent appeared at dinner that evening she was more like her old self than she had been since her return from Devonshire. Her brightness had returned and she looked gay and happy. It was wonderful to feel quite free from anxiety on Olave's account, and she had also made up her mind to go to London on the following day and to see Guy. The thought of seeing him filled her with a strange excitement.

She and Agnes dined alone together. When dessert was on the table and the servants had left the room Felicity said suddenly:

"Aggie, I want you to know that I've quite changed about Olave. You were quite right to scold me as you did when I first came back from abroad about neglecting my duty. So you'll be glad to hear that I'm not going to neglect it any more. I was dreadfully miserable when Olave was so very ill, and I felt that if anything happened to her it would kill me." Her charming face grew suddenly soft, but there was no emotion in her voice. "I began to realize all that I have missed in giving up my own child, even to you, dear Aggie. It isn't only what she has missed as you were kind enough to say, it's what I've let so carelessly slip from me. I mean to have Olave with me in future; she shall make her home with us in London."

Miss Ardern had not been wholly unprepared for

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some statement of the kind, but perhaps she had imagined something of a less drastic description. If, however, the blow was a heavy one she gave no sign of pain. The admirable self-control of years stood her in good stead now.

"I am quite sure you will make her very happy, Fay," she said.

If the change contributed to the happiness of those two persons who were dearest to her in all the world she felt that she would solicit no reprieve from the sorrow it must inevitably bring to herself. But Olave? What would Olave say? She felt that Olave would suffer, too, if the plan were to be carried out.

"I should like her to come to us as soon as we return from our honeymoon," said Lady Trent.

"You don't think Mr. Quinn will mind such an arrangement?" said Miss Ardern quietly.

"I shall not ask his opinion," said Felicity, with characteristic decision.

There was a touch of irritation in her voice as if she resented the fact that Agnes should suggest any obstacle of the kind.

"Poor, old Aggie," she continued, "it's high time you were relieved of your responsibility. When you first put it into my head that I ought to occupy myself more with Olave you will remember that I tabooed the idea. I felt that a growing-up daughter would be dreadfully in my way. But it was the fear of losing her that made me change—that taught me exactly how dear she was to me. Almost," her voice was a little lowered now, "almost dearer than Guy."

"When do you mean to tell her of this change of plans?" said Agnes Ardern.

"When I tell her about my engagement. She shall have both shocks at the same time! I am going to London to-morrow for a day or two, and I

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shall see Guy and I suppose we shall arrange things then. I have treated him very badly; I have never even written to him and it's more than a fortnight since we came back. But I was so afraid he would wish to come, and I didn't want even Guy here when the child was so ill. It's strange, but Olave almost made me forget him."

Miss Ardern waited a moment. So the new Olave at this critical juncture was to be handed over to the new Felicity. Her heart sank, and she was thinking more of the daughter than of the mother.

"Has it ever occurred to you, Fay, that it may make Olave unhappy to leave Nether Cheldon?"

"You are putting it gracefully, Aggie," replied Felicity, annoyed at this second objection which she felt might prove greater and more insurmountable than the first. "I suppose you mean that she will be miserable at having to leave her aunt for her mother? I admit I have neglected my duty in the past—you have told me so yourself—but you must please to understand that I love Olave now, and I mean to teach her to love me in return. I know the way to make people care for me, and I'm sure I shan't fail with Olave."

She spoke with a kind of careless confidence. Even now it was impossible for her to be otherwise than perfectly frank with Agnes.

"I shall try to make up to her for all those years when I took so little notice of her!"

Miss Ardern winced slightly for the first time.

As they left the dining-room together Felicity slipped her hand into her sister's arm.

"You mustn't mind, Aggie. I know it's hard for you. But I mean to make Olave love me even more than she loves you!"

Agnes bravely answered:

"I am sure you will succeed, Fay. After all I've only been a deputy, and what I've been able to

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give her has been a very poor substitute for a mother's love."

They went into the library. The summer dusk was deepening into night. Bats flew past, vanishing like swift specters into the shadows. The great windows were all wide open, and the warm air was heavy and languorous with the scent of jessamine, night stocks, and syringa. Heavy-bodied white moths flashed out against the darkness of the shrubs and then disappeared. Above the flat black branches of the cedars the clear dark blue sky was sown with stars.

The sisters sat down near each other beside an open window. For a few minutes neither spoke. Lady Trent was the first to break the silence.

"My life has been so purposeless," she said, "and now I think it is going to become almost too full. Instead of being quite alone as I have been for so many years I shall have two people always with me —Olave and Guy. Why, we shall be quite a household! You must come and stay with us very often, Aggie, just to see how splendidly domestic I shall have become!"

"I suppose you still intend to be married in September?" said Miss Ardern.

"I almost think it might be in August," said Felicity, deeply thoughtful. "I shall be in such a hurry, you know, to get back to Olave. We might settle down in Waverton Street the first week in October. I shall give the front room over mine to Olave, it's really a very charming room. But don't say anything to her please, Aggie. I shall tell her the moment I get back. I would rather she heard it all from me in the first place."

"Of course," agreed Agnes.

But Olave—what would Olave say?

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CHAPTER X

GUY'S SUSPICIONS ARE AWAKENED

LADY Trent was sitting alone in her drawing-room at Waverton Street on the following afternoon. The room was small and double, and with its parquet floor, its old furniture, the delicate water-colors and prints that hung on the white walls, it presented a charming and dainty appearance thoroughly in keeping with its owner.

Felicity sat on the sofa. Some illustrated papers and a book or two lay on a small table by her side, and now and then she took one up and glanced perfunctorily at its contents. From thence her eyes traveled to the clock on the mantel-piece. It was not yet quite five o'clock—the hour at which she had invited Guy Quinn to come to see her.

This meeting with the man whom she had not seen since she had promised to be his wife was an event which she could not bring herself to envisage with her usual calm philosophy. She felt nervous rather than excited. She was aware that she was no longer quite the same person whom Guy had known and with whom he had fallen in love on board the Baxter's yacht. She had passed through a novel experience since then, had witnessed the awakening within herself of dormant emotions whose existence she had not even suspected, and she was now about to disclose to Guy those new plans she had formed for the future. Perhaps Agnes was right—he would not approve of them. He might be bored by the prospect of having Olave always with them.

The happenings of the last fortnight had been so nearly tragic that she could not possibly recover all at once her old attitude toward life. Her thoughts

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had been so full of Olave during that time that she had often forgotten to think about Guy at all. She must hide this fact from him, he was sensitive, slightly conceited, and she was afraid of wounding him by such a disclosure. She had, sometimes, even doubted the reality of her own love for him, so completely had he slipped during those days into the obscure background of her thoughts.

Almost on the stroke of five Quinn was announced. He came in looking both younger and eager. Felicity's unspoken thought was: "How young he looks to-day. I am sure I must look years older. He ought to marry a young girl."

Guy came up to her and took the hand she held out to him.

"Dear Felicity," he murmured.

Something in his voice and look seemed to chase all undesirable reluctances and difficulties from her mind. She surrendered to his first embrace, relieved to find that her feeling for him had undergone no apparent change.

"You might have written," he said at last, releasing her and looking down into her face with blue eyes that were now full of a tender reproach. "Until I got your note this afternoon I had been utterly without news of you for a fortnight. I did not even know where you were."

"Oh, surely I told you in my letter I was going home to see Olave because she was very ill?" said Lady Trent.

"Yes. But I hadn't an idea where your home was! I've never all this time known where you were."

"Never mind, Guy. I've been hideously anxious but that's all past, and my little girl's picking up wonderfully—she's so strong you know. And of course I thought you knew we lived at Cheldon."

"Cheldon?" repeated Guy, almost as if he had

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not heard aright. "Do you really mean to tell me that you have been down at Cheldon all this time?"

Lady Trent was sitting on the sofa, and Guy still continued to stand in front of her. He looked as horrified and alarmed as if he had suddenly been confronted with a very disagreeable specter.

"But I know I told you I was going home to look after Olave," said Lady Trent, mystified and a little irritated by his odd manner; "and I'm sure you must really have heard me mention Cheldon over and over again. It is our home in Gloucestershire where Agnes lives with Olave. I always wondered why you didn't write to me there instead of sending your letters to this address!"

"I suppose," he said, in a voice that sounded gruff from the strain he was imposing upon it, "that it must be somewhere near Cheldon Park where I have been staying recently with Lady Mercer.

"The Manor is about three miles from the Mercers' place," said Lady Trent. "Were you there while I was in Devonshire with Aggie?"

This possibility interested her. It was an unusual coincidence and showed her clearly that Guy was not mistaken—she could never have mentioned Cheldon to him.

"I can't say. I do not even know exactly when you were in Devonshire. You kept me so in the dark as to your movements." His tone was aggrieved, but all the time he had the feeling that imprisoning forces were closing relentlessly about him.

"There is nothing to look so tragic about," said Lady Trent, smiling. "I really meant to write to you from home but as I have just told you I was too horribly frightened about Olave to think of anything. I broke down at last and had to go to bed myself."

Guy said in a slow, musing tone:

"I suppose then that Olave is the girl on whose

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account Lady Mercer was called away while I was down at Cheldon."

He felt as if fate and Lady Trent had suddenly combined to flourish before his eyes the finished pattern which he shrank from contemplating. Still, there was no need as yet to believe the worst and identify Olave Trent with his little Primavera of the woods.

"Of course she was. How odd it has been. To think you were there and didn't know Olave was my little girl!" Felicity was astonished at the curious chance that had thus arisen. "But I felt sure I had mentioned Cheldon to you a hundred times!"

"Not once!" declared Guy wrathfully. "If you had only mentioned it *once* I should certainly have remembered it! Especially as I had friends of my own in the neighborhood. You have always been so extraordinarily uncommunicative about your own affairs. I don't believe I even knew your daughter's name was Olave!"

"I can't see that it's a matter of such vast importance," said Lady Trent; "when one travels a great deal and is continually meeting fresh people, one gets out of the habit of talking about oneself." She smiled at him in a pacific manner, wondering a little why he was making a fuss about such a trifle. "You have got all the rest of your life to learn these interesting details about us!"

"It seems absurd that I should not know even unimportant details about the woman I am going to marry," said Guy, speaking rapidly and with a certain violence of emphasis that continued to astonish her.

"The woman was unfortunately too busy and too pre-occupied to give them," said Lady Trent with a hint of asperity. She did not like his tone which had something both of anger and reproach in it

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and she was completely bewildered by the manifestation of these emotions.

Perhaps his little outburst of ill-humor was the outcome of wounded pride at finding himself so swiftly relegated to a secondary position just after their engagement. She could hardly blame him for that.

Presently there followed a more agreeable interlude when Guy produced a wonderful diamond ring which he slipped upon her finger. Even Felicity, who already possessed quantities of jewelry of the most superb kind, was astonished at its magnificence. The stones glinted and sparkled on her hand. She was so genuinely delighted with it that Guy was mollified, and resolved to think no more of disagreeable contingencies. Still, if she had only mentioned Cheldon to him how careful he would have been. He would never have embarked upon that unwise, delightful, idyllic flirtation with little Primavera. He would have been aware of danger; prudence would certainly have prevailed.

"We hope you will come to Cheldon very soon," said Felicity, presently. "Agnes, that is my sister, is most anxious to meet you. Do not, please, tell me that I have never mentioned Agnes to you! She has been mother and sister to me all in one—the dearest person in the world."

"I shall like to come very much indeed," said Guy. "I want to meet your sister—and your daughter," he added, in a slightly constrained tone.

"I think you will be surprised when you see Olave. I had been away so long—I hadn't seen her for nearly a year—and I was surprised to find how much she'd grown! I can't call her my little girl any more, she is almost as tall as I am, and soon she will be a great deal taller, she's growing so very rapidly."

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"As tall as you!" cried Guy, in undisguised dismay and astonishment. He had so pinned his faith upon the youth of Olave—it was the one apparent discrepancy between the two girls that had really comforted him. "Why, I thought from the way you always spoke of her that she was quite a small child!"

"She will be seventeen in September; you know I married at seventeen," said Lady Trent. "And she is such a dear pretty child, Guy. Aggie's kept her almost too much of a child to my thinking, but I gave her a free hand, so I mustn't complain. It will be different in the future."

"Different? How do you mean different?" inquired Guy.

"Well, I mean, I have rather changed my mind about leaving her down at Cheldon. I don't suppose you thought I was a particularly devoted mother, did you, Guy? But Olave's illness opened my eyes. If I had lost her—" She paused, and her face turned suddenly pale. "It taught me how dear she was." She changed her tone to a more normal and matter-of-fact one. "I'm certain she's going to be pretty and a great success. I am looking forward to having her here with us directly we return from our honeymoon."

"Here—with us?" said Quinn, in a tone that seemed to justify Miss Ardern's most gloomy prognostications. "Why, I thought you told me that she always lived with your sister, that you had no intention of having her with you?"

"So I did, but that was before her illness. She has lived all her life with Aggie at Cheldon—that proves that I *did* mention Cheldon to you—but the time has come for me to look after my own daughter. There are little things I want to change. She's led too quiet a life, she's hardly seen anyone.

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That isn't the way to bring up a girl in these days, Guy. But apart from that I want to have my daughter with me."

She spoke now in a frank, decided tone. If Quinn had had more experience of Felicity he would have known also how futile would be any remonstrance on his part.

His expression of dismay did not escape her.

"This is quite a new idea!" he said warmly, "and I am sure that to have a third person always with us will be a decided *gêne!*"

"I'm sorry you don't like the idea, Guy. But that's because you haven't seen Olave. When you do you will change your mind. She will make a perfectly charming addition to our household."

"I don't feel like taking to an almost grown-up stepdaughter," he declared. "I am sure she will be horribly in the way!"

This second manifestation of ill-humor astonished her even more than the first. She hoped that he was not bad-tempered. Hitherto she had only seen the pleasant, agreeable side of him. Yet she was not altogether displeased to find that he intended to be master. Felicity had had her own way too long to resent a change of the kind. She was falling little by little under the old spell which had first turned her thoughts to him during that yachting trip. His fascination for her had not really diminished.

"She will not be at all in the way," she said, after a moment's pause. "I shan't let her. She won't interfere with you in the least. Don't, please, make any more objections, Guy. We have both got to make certain sacrifices to marry each other, haven't we? I really think mine are the hardest. So you see there must be give and take!" She smiled at him now with a confident affection that touched

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him. "And I know you have only got to see her, you won't be able to help taking to her—she's such a lovely child!"

Take to her? He had a vision of Primavera then; her soft face flooded with color, her dark eyes uplifted to his. A lovely child! Did he not know how lovely? The Fates were beginning to torture their victim now; he could feel their nets enclosing him fast so that he could never escape.

His face grew suddenly changed and rather aged.

"Anyhow, I think I'd rather you left her at Cheldon for a bit."

His voice sounded rough.

"I have promised to relieve Aggie of the responsibility of her. It isn't fair to either of them to leave Olave down there always. And besides I wish to have her, Guy."

He began to see that all his protests, direct and indirect, had piteously failed. He felt like a man lost in a dark maze from which there was no exit. There was nothing to be done now except to defer the actual meeting with Olave for as long as possible. There was always a chance—just the frail ghost of a chance—that the girl he had met in the woods was not after all Olave Trent. But what a fool he had been! *What* a fool! And his folly promised a ripe and full harvest of consequences that might even wreck the destiny that had been in imagination so fair.

"There's one more thing, Guy," said Felicity, "I hope you won't mind my being frank about it. You're not a devout Catholic, I know, so I'm sure you won't try any proselytizing tricks with Olave? She's at such a susceptible age and novelty has a great charm. I shouldn't like her to become a Catholic. Nether Cheldon will be hers one of these days and I shouldn't like to think it had passed into Catholic hands."

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"You may be quite sure that I shall never have the slightest wish to convert her," he said. "And I am afraid you need fear nothing from my example." It was almost savage the way in which he now turned the edge of the sword against himself.

Felicity looked relieved.

"I'm glad you're not *intransigeant*, Guy. I don't think I could have married a Catholic who was."

He was almost glad when tea was over and he could decently make an excuse to depart. Even Felicity felt that the interview had not been in close correspondence with her own imagining of it. Something had gone a little awry from the very beginning, first about Cheldon and then about Olave. It seemed to her, too, when he rose to go away and stooped to touch her lips with his own that the embrace lacked ardor.

"You're not really annoyed, are you, Guy?" she asked, looking at his handsome, discontented, rather sullen face.

She looked beautiful thus, seen close and smiling with lips and eyes.

He melted a little before this appeal and the second kiss was less cold; there was almost a suggestion of remorse in it.

"Oh, my dearest, can't you see I want to be alone with you? I don't want a third person eternally here!"

"It's a pity I'm a widow with an only daughter," she said smiling, yet with no hint of giving away. "But you must try to put up with me, with us, I mean. Now don't pretend that I didn't tell you I was a widow with a daughter even though you have forgotten about Cheldon!"

Forgotten about Cheldon? Well, there was no fear of his ever forgetting in the future that most odious and ill-fated of Cotswold names! Upper Cheldon, Nether Cheldon, Cheldon on the Hill and

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Cheldon Parva, his mind rapidly reviewed the whole horrible gamut of Cheldons! What had he done that it should write itself across his life in these indelible characters? The very word pursued him, and mocked him like a relentless and haunting ghost.

That slim slip of a girl—a Dryad called into mortal semblance by the first kiss of love, his kiss. Was she destined to come eternally between him and the woman he still believed that he loved? Would she avenge the trivial wrong he had done her by taking all the sweetness out of his life? Only he knew that he could never live side by side with her, in the same house, meeting her daily. No one, even Felicity, could ask that of him.

CHAPTER XI

OLAVE MAKES A CONFESSION

WHEN Guy had gone Felicity realized how near their discussions had approached to actual disagreement. She could not help seeing that he was very much opposed to the idea of having Olave to live with them. Yet even in retrospect this circumstance did not satisfactorily explain his mood throughout the interview, a mood which had both baffled and perplexed her. Of course he had the artistic temperament which often led men into byways of nervous moodiness; she was quite prepared to make ample allowances for that. But it must not be allowed to hang like a curtain of darkness over their first hours spent together as engaged lovers.

"It's all nonsense, he must learn to like her," she

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thought to herself when he had taken his departure. She dismissed the subject from her mind with the happy ease of a person who is accustomed to impose her will upon others.

Indeed, to give way in the matter never occurred to her for a moment. She was quite convinced that when Guy saw Olave—and of course he must see her as soon as possible—he would be immediately attracted by the brightness and beauty and charm of her.

She was flattered, nevertheless, by his obvious desire to be alone with her when they were married.

"I shall tell Olave directly I go home," she thought to herself.

Her heart grew soft when she thought of Olave. She was going, perhaps, to be as selfish in her new devotion to her as she had been in her past neglect. For she did not disguise to herself that so far she was the only one who would be in the least in favor of the plan. Agnes would be miserable and very lonely without the girl; Guy objected most strongly to the thought of having her with them. And Olave? It was unlikely that just at first Olave would be keenly anxious to leave the home where her life had been spent.

Lady Trent discovered, however, during her short stay in London that Guy's mood was no passing thing. His book was finished, he informed her, so it was not that which was worrying him. But he was certainly not the pleasant, agreeable companion she had hoped to find, and once or twice she found herself wondering what had happened to him during the interval between her first departure for Cheldon and her return to London. She believed that he loved her, that he was not regretting his engagement, but she felt certain that he was keeping something from her. Felicity was the least curious

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of women, she was always far too much occupied with her own affairs for that, and she had long ago learned the wisdom of never asking questions. She did not try therefore to discover what ailed him. But in consequence of this, of something inexplicable and disquieting in his attitude, she left London rather sooner than she had originally intended. But when he came to see her off at Paddington and she repeated her invitation to him to come down to Cheldon as soon as he liked, she was met by excuses. Not a definite refusal but an unflattering reluctance that was not in the least disguised. She felt a sudden chill of disappointment. She had wanted to welcome him to her own home, to see him with Agnes and Olave, to admit him into that family intimacy that was beginning to be so precious to her. And Guy plainly showed her that he was in no hurry to submit to the ordeal.

During Lady Trent's absence in London Olave was carried out into the garden for the first time. She lay on a couch in the shadow of the group of cedars. Through the flat black branches, emerald-tipped, she could see glimpses of the grey line of hills beyond the park, and of Ardern's Knoll with its clump of beeches and pines stenciled against the clear sky.

She was lying there with half-closed eyes with a smile on her lips one afternoon, when Miss Ardern came upon her. She approached her unperceived, and it seemed to her—one of the least imaginative of women—that the girl was indulging in some strange secret dream that softened all the lines of her delicately-drawn face and made her look at once younger and happier and yet in a sense more mature. This look stirred anew all the misgivings in Agnes Ardern's heart. For, somehow, she was reminded sharply of what Felicity had been eighteen years ago.

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Through the irritable querulous stage of Olave's convalescence Miss Ardern had proved all that was gentle and patient and enduring. She could not but feel that apart from everything else there was a heavy trial in store for her niece. How would she bear that exile from Cheldon? Agnes felt almost like a traitor for giving her no hint of that impending calamity. For would not Olave very justifiably feel herself to be the victim of her mother's latest caprice? Would she not rebel against that proposed change? Musing thus Agnes came close to her and laid her hand softly upon hers.

Olave looked up startled by the sudden touch. There was an almost guilty expression on her face, as if she feared that Miss Ardern might have the power to read those wonderful secret thoughts of hers.

To-day Olave looked almost well. She had a strong young constitution and this had been her first experience of a severe illness. She was getting rapidly better. Perhaps the time had come? Agnes sat down by her side.

"What are you thinking of, Olave?" she asked.

Olave did not speak. She lay there gazing at her aunt with an expression of terror in her eyes.

What did Aunt Aggie know? Had she guessed anything?

A kind of panic seized Olave and suddenly she began to cry in a frightened way, as a child does when he finds himself detected in some nursery crime. Perhaps, Miss Ardern had found out all about those secret meetings in the woods. Her illness had in no way diminished the impression they had made upon Olave's mind and heart. But although they had been so beautiful Olave felt both guilty and ashamed when she looked back upon them. Sometimes she had even believed that her illness, with all its pain

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and suffering, had been in a sense a punishment. There was something terrible to her in this thought. She had been deceitful and underhand; she had stolen away day after day to meet this man, a stranger of whom she knew nothing, and then just as she was preparing to do so for the last time she had been stricken down by this sudden illness. The thought made her long to make a full confession to her aunt. The reproaches of her own shamed conscience had begun to be very unbearable.

"Why are you crying, Olave?" inquired Miss Ardern, in a tone of mild astonishment. "I have not said anything to make you cry."

Olave continued to sob convulsively. She hid her face in her handkerchief.

"I really can't let you cry like this," said Miss Ardern, with a hint of severity in her voice; "it will only make you ill again. You must control yourself for I haven't said anything that could possibly upset you. But if you were thinking of something you have done, something that perhaps you have been keeping from me, you had far better relieve your mind by telling me about it. I have never been harsh with you, my dear, and I am not likely to begin now while you are still so weak."

There was a good deal of kind quiet persuasion in Miss Ardern's voice as she said these encouraging words. But there was firmness, too, because she was convinced now that Olave had something to hide from her and she was determined to know what it was. She told herself it was because she dreaded, almost more than anything in the world, a repetition of Felicity's experience in the life of Felicity's daughter.

Olave pulled herself together, yielding as one accustomed to the voice of unquestionable authority. She stopped crying with an effort but her words were still interrupted by a breathless sobbing.

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"Aunt Aggie, there is something I want to tell you. Only please don't scold me more than you can help, and please, *please* don't tell mother!"

"I can not make any promises. But you can, I think, trust me to do what is best and wisest for you," she answered in her steady voice.

And she laid her hand again on Olave's as if to give her the requisite courage to proceed.

There was something reassuring in the touch.

Miss Ardern knew perfectly well that she was about to receive the explanation of all those confused, delirious utterances that had so startled and alarmed her on that first night of her return. And she saw that across Olave's fear and reluctance there was also an inconsistent eagerness to make the confession and thereby unburden her soul.

Olave looked at her aunt and saw that her face was unusually grave, even a little stern.

"You will be dreadfully displeased with me, Aunt Aggie," she said, almost in a whisper.

The pressure of her aunt's hand comforted her. Her thin fingers clung to it as once they had clung to Guy's hand out there in the woods when the fierce storm and wild sweeping darkness had descended upon them.

"It happened when you were away with mother—just before I was ill," said Olave. Her cheeks were flushed now and her dark eyes were brilliant with excitement and ill-suppressed fear. She looked extraordinarily like Felicity in the days when Sir Digby Trent had so obstinately wooed her.

"I—met a man in the woods—in Ardern's Knoll —" said Olave, and the words sounded tragic in their dire import to Miss Ardern's ears, "and I think I fell in love with him." She turned her face away from her aunt in an extremity of shame and distress. "He fell in love with me, too, that is why I stayed out so late in the rain."

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"A man in the woods? In Ardern's Knoll?" repeated Miss Ardern, with actual dismay.

At the worst she told herself she had anticipated a harmless escapade with Tom Mercer who had always shown a certain liking for Olave.

"This man—who is he? What is his name?" she demanded sternly. She passed in rapid review the young unmarried men of the neighborhood. There were not many, and she did not know of one who would venture to induce Miss Trent of Nether Cheldon to meet him clandestinely in Ardern's Knoll.

"He never told me who he was," said Olave; "and I didn't tell him my name either. He wished to have it like that."

"How often did you meet him?" Miss Ardern was resolved to show no mercy in her questioning till she had extracted the uttermost truth from Olave.

"Three or four days running until I was ill. I was too ill to go that last time, and now I think he must have gone away."

"Did this man actually tell you that he loved you, Olave?"

"Yes, Aunt Aggie," answered Olave in a low voice.

"He did not," continued Miss Ardern almost harshly, "ask you to marry him?"

"No, he couldn't do that. But he explained why," said Olave simply.

Miss Ardern's heart sank.

"He wasn't married?" she asked. There was something sharply anxious in her tone as if she were no longer able to repress a fear that was becoming acute.

"No, but he is going to be very soon," answered Olave. "I didn't know that at first—I thought almost he wanted to marry me if he did not think me too young. But he was already engaged or nearly

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so. At first I cried, you see I thought he did really love me—only me. I—I—let him kiss me," she added.

"He *kissed* you, Olave?" said Miss Ardern, looking at her niece with eyes that were strangely stern. "This man whose name you did not know?"

"You see I thought we should soon be engaged—like mother who was engaged when she was very little older than I am now."

The case was difficult to deal with. It was so evident that no thought of the flagrancy of such behavior seemed to have occurred to Olave. The secrecy with which the affair had been conducted had touched her conscience for she was naturally of a very frank disposition, and this had moved her to make a confession. But when she spoke of those past kisses there was more pride than shame in her voice and eyes.

Miss Ardern had never known the kiss of love. It was something that, whether for good or ill, had remained outside her own experience. Perhaps she had not missed it very much, perhaps she had not greatly desired it. All her love had been centered simply, wholesomely, and unselfishly around the persons of her father, her sister, and then her niece. But she grieved, as older women often may, over a too premature experience of love in one for whom they care very much. It seemed to have robbed Olave of something of her soft bloom, of her first ignorant innocence. Something that indubitably should have been kept for the man she would hereafter marry.

Perhaps after all Felicity with her firsthand knowledge of the world and of life would have been far more capable of dealing adequately with such a situation.

"Olave," she said at last, almost in despair, "did

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you never think it was very wrong to go and meet this man alone in the woods and to let him behave in this way to you?"

"I was afraid that if you found out about it you might be very angry," said Olave, in a low troubled voice. "But he is so much older than I am, and he said it wasn't wrong, so I thought perhaps it was all right."

"Even though you felt you were doing something I should not approve of?"

"I never disobeyed you!" cried Olave eagerly; "you have never forbidden me to go to Ardern's Knoll alone. I did not go outside our own place."

Miss Ardern felt a rising and fierce indignation against this man who, disregarding all her careful precautions for the proper protection of her niece, had thus stolen in and won—how far she did not yet know—the first young love of her heart.

"He must be a perfectly horrible man," she said warmly.

"Oh, but he really wasn't! He was most awfully nice. He was quite a dear and you would have liked him, too. He was so gay and—greedy!"

"Greedy?" repeated Miss Ardern, in an amazed tone.

"You see we had a picnic together and I took strawberries and peaches—that was on the second day. He ate them nearly all. He did so enjoy the peaches—luckily there were two splendid ones."

Miss Ardern was now deeply mystified. She hardly knew how to classify the adventure.

"He was staying with the Mercers," continued Olave, "and, perhaps, some day when you see her you could find out from Lady Mercer who it was who was staying there just when I was taken ill. But you mustn't tell her anything. He was particularly anxious that the Mercers shouldn't know anything about our—our picnics."

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This statement relieved in some measure the acute apprehension of Miss Ardern. Lady Mercer's guests might conceivably be a trifle unconventional, but at least they were probably respectable members of society. The man had no doubt found it agreeable to philander with a young and pretty girl in the woods. Perhaps he did not perceive how different Olave was from the usual modern "flapper." Or did this difference constitute a fresh charm in his eyes? She began to think the adventure, although foolish, had also probably been quite harmless.

"Olave, I am very glad you have told me," she said after a moment's pause, "but now I think you have talked about it quite enough. I'll find out what I can from Lady Mercer later on without betraying your very silly little secret. You have been silly, you know, and you've behaved very vulgarly, like a common little girl who has never been taught anything." There was a touch of anger in her voice, and Agnes Ardern had very seldom been angry with Olave. She had always punished her as little as possible, and she did not quite understand why she wished so strongly that it had been possible to punish her now. Perhaps it was to teach her a necessary lesson so that she might be saved from the fate of Felicity.

"I am sorry," said Olave weakly. The rebuke seemed to sting afresh that sense of shame. "But you won't tell mother, will you?"

"I think at present it will be best not to mention the matter to her. She will be here this evening. And she is sure to be tired after her journey in the heat."

"Oh, I don't want her to know *ever*," said Olave dismayed. "She might say something to Lady Mercer who always tells Judy everything and then I should never hear the end of it from Judy and Babs and the boys!"

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Her whole attitude was such a curious admixture of childishness and mature experience that again Miss Ardern felt powerless to cope with the situation. She wished it had only been possible to tell Felicity the whole story, and appeal to her for calm and wise and temperate advice.

She knew that the legend of the slumbering princess in Briar Rose, kissed to awakening by the intruding prince, has many analogies in real life. It remained to see how far that awakening had been effected, and in what measure Olave had given him her love.

Then, as if in answer to these questions, Olave stretched out her hand and said timidly:

"Dear Aunt Aggie, if you only knew how I long and long to see him again! If he were to come now, walking across the grass toward us, it would send me mad with joy. Only," her voice sank, "there isn't really any hope of his being free. That other woman—I know she must love him—she couldn't help herself! I sometimes wonder if she loves him as much as I do, and if she is as happy as—as I should have been, to know she is going to be his wife."

After that there seemed really very little doubt as to the impression which that first kiss had made upon the slumbering princess, who had been guarded with such tender care and vigilance as if from this very possibility.

CHAPTER XII

LADY TRENT ANNOUNCES HER ENGAGEMENT

FURTHER conversation was rendered impossible by the arrival of Felicity, who appeared from the library window looking radiantly beautiful and extremely happy. She wore a cool grey linen coat

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and skirt and a broad-brimmed white hat, and she looked very little older than Olave herself.

"Dear Aggie—darling Olave!" she murmured, kissing them both in turn. "I hope you haven't had tea yet, I'm dying for mine. We must have it out here."

She sank into one of the wicker-chairs on the lawn, and leaning back looked for a moment attentively at Olave.

Her whole aspect was softened, and it was obvious that things were going well with her. She had forgotten Guy's odd moodiness and had convinced herself that it was of no importance. And all the time in the train she had been eagerly looking forward to seeing Olave again, and to the delightful task of unfolding future plans to her.

There was something very brilliant and vivid about her to-day, something that compelled attention and admiration. Agnes knew as she looked at her that she was finding happiness in her engagement, it made her look changed and young as a successful love-affair so often does when a woman is past her first youth.

"I will tell them to bring tea at once," said Miss Ardern, rising and going toward the house.

She had a strong feeling that Felicity wished to be alone with her daughter.

Olave lay back on the couch and closed her eyes. Her mother's sudden arrival had made her feel tired and nervous; she almost disliked being left alone with her.

"I hope you are feeling ever so much better, darling," said Lady Trent, and she moved her chair a little nearer to Olave's couch.

Olave opened her eyes. A kind of constraint came over her. She wished that Aunt Agnes had not gone away.

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"I am much better, thank you, mother. I really feel almost well."

"I'm so glad," said Lady Trent. "We must have some drives together directly you are fit for it."

She spoke with her usual careless charm. Olave felt a little surprised at the suggestion, she could not remember that her mother had ever invited her to go for a drive with her before. It meant, perhaps, that she intended to spend some little time at Cheldon, instead of rushing off elsewhere after a few days' visit.

Lady Trent could not but observe the gloom that had come over her. Olave had relapsed into that constrained silence which is so painful between people who are closely related and who ought to be very dear to each other. It told her that the task of winning her daughter's affections had still to be accomplished.

Agnes, who had purposely left them alone together, would have given worlds to have prevented the interview between them which, given Felicity's eager imperious temperament, could not long be delayed. She dreaded its effect upon Olave. Would the mother's confession surprise Olave into a recital of her own love-affair? If Felicity succeeded in evoking any sympathy from Olave by the announcement of her recent engagement to Quinn, it was more than probable that this would happen. The thought made Agnes vaguely anxious. She did not wish anything of the kind to take place. She was afraid that Felicity might be seriously angry with her daughter, and might also blame her for not guarding the girl more securely.

There seemed to Agnes a subtle danger in the changed attitude of Felicity toward Olave. The separation had been so complete, had indeed lasted so long, that the girl was not able to remember any

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other condition of things, and the estrangement thus effected had been, to say the least of it, a very unnatural one. It was not a thing that could be altered in a single day. One can not establish intimacy and confidence, to say nothing of love, by a wave, so to speak, of the wand. Much readjustment would be required to construct and consolidate the proposed change so as to make it perfectly acceptable to Olave. It would be an upheaval which would probably cause her suffering. Agnes felt certain that there would be trouble with Olave at first. Afterward, when Felicity's charm and fascination, combined with her love, had done their work, the mother would without doubt conquer. There was surely no possibility of ultimate failure for this mission of Felicity's. But it would not be easy, and at first she might meet with a not unmerited resistance. And with what temper would Lady Trent encounter such resistance? She had a strong will, and when it met with sustained opposition she could be a very hard woman.

Agnes longed anxiously to hear how Olave had received the information of her mother's betrothal and of the impending change in her own life.

Under the cedars Felicity was saying:

"Olave, dear, there is something I want to tell you very much. I think I should like you to hear it now, before Aggie comes back."

"Yes, mother?" said Olave, in a cool interrogative tone. She was not interested in any communication her mother could offer, and there was a complete absence of cordiality from her manner.

She was, however, perfectly polite; she had not forgotten that little scolding Felicity had bestowed upon her when she first returned from abroad.

"I think you will be very much astonished," said Felicity, "when I tell you that I am going to be married again, Olave."

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She quickly perceived that her words had aroused Olave brusquely from her attitude of indolent attention. A wave of crimson flooded her face. She looked at her mother and in her eyes there was a kind of dull envy. She envied her beauty, her happiness, her radiant delicious appearance of perfect health. It seemed such a long time since she herself had felt quite well and strong. Not since that wet Sunday evening in Ardern's Knoll.

"Are you?" she said. "Will it be soon?"

"Yes, I think it will be quite soon. Perhaps at the end of next month or early in September," said Felicity carelessly.

Olave did not ask the name of her future stepfather. She waited a little and then she said impulsively:

"How very happy you must be. I think it must be so wonderful to be engaged to someone you really love more than all the world, and who loves you, too."

She wondered in a dazed way if her mother cared for the man she was going to marry as she had herself cared for that man she had met day after day in Ardern's Knoll. But it couldn't be the same, she decided after a brief review of the situation. Her mother had known long ago what it meant to love and to be loved. And Olave was too young to believe that the human heart is capable of loving twice.

But something in her words had evoked Lady Trent's surprise.

"Why, my dear child, what can you possibly know about it?" she inquired, with a touch of derision in her voice. She had not suspected this strain of sentimentality in her daughter and considered that Agnes ought to have discovered and corrected it.

Olave, feeling that she had made a false step, colored even more deeply. She had the uncomfort-

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able feeling that her body was red hot from her forehead down to her toes. She was ashamed of herself for this foolish betrayal of emotion, and could only hope that her mother had not noticed it. Unfortunately for her Felicity was by nature extremely observant and critical and the blush, following upon Olave's rather surprising comment, made her feel vaguely anxious and still slightly annoyed with Agnes.

"I thought Aggie didn't let you read novels," she said rather severely.

"She doesn't," said Olave. "She was angry when she found me reading one only the other day."

Lady Trent returned to the subject in hand, waiving for the moment the discussion of mysterious and perplexing side-issues.

"I shall want him to see you very soon," she said. "I am so anxious that you should like each other. You must get well quickly, Olave."

Olave regarded her mother with increased interest and attention. How wonderful—how wonderful, so ran her thoughts, to know that your wedding was to be perhaps next month.

"When you were first married," she said, looking at Felicity with eyes that since her illness had become slightly too large for her face, "you were very little older than I am now."

"Yes," said Felicity, "it is a great mistake for any girl to marry as young as that. One's relations ought not to allow it."

"But if you love a person very much," said Olave, "it would be cruel of anyone to prevent your marrying him."

Again Felicity felt that anxious wonder. Did Agnes know that Olave had such thoughts as these?

"Even if you love a person very much it is wiser to wait," she said briskly.

Olave felt again that curious dull envy of her

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mother. Not only now because she was happy and beautiful and in such radiant health, but because she possessed such complete liberty and independence, and had full power to control her life and actions. There was no one to tell her that things were wrong, and to scold her for meeting people and for listening to words of love. She was certain, too, that if her mother chanced to hear of it she would also condemn with unhesitating severity the history of her meetings with the strange young man in the woods.

"You haven't asked his name. Don't you wish to hear it?" said Lady Trent.

"Please tell me," said Olave.

She was back again in the delicious contemplation of her own dream; she hardly heeded what her mother was saying.

"His name is Guy Quinn. You may have heard of him, he is quite a well-nown novelist."

Olave turned to her mother with increased attention. "Oh, I have heard of him," she said eagerly. "I began to read one of his books once, but Aunt Aggie was angry and took it away from me."

Felicity smiled.

"Of course he doesn't profess to write for little girls. But when you are older you shall read them all."

"I wonder if he writes out-of-doors?" said Olave softly.

It was strange that this Mr. Quinn whom her mother was to marry should also be a writer. Perhaps the two men knew each other.

Felicity, who had no clue to Olave's mysterious utterance, was again a little startled at the unusual comment.

"Oh, I shouldn't think so. Probably he writes in his study in the ordinary prosaic way. Unless he's traveling abroad he prefers to live in London."

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Suddenly she bent over her daughter and took her hand in hers.

"Olave, darling, there's something else I want to tell you. Something that concerns yourself. You have lived here all these years with Aunt Aggie, perhaps you have come to think of Cheldon as your home. But I want to change all that. I see that it isn't right for me to give you up so entirely to Aggie—" She hesitated for Olave's face had become hard and set and there was a startled incredulous expression in her eyes. What did her mother mean? What change was to be inaugurated? She drew her hand away.

"I'm not going to wander about the world any more," continued Lady Trent, "you see I shall have Guy to look after and he prefers to live a great deal in London and there will be his work to consider. So when we come back from our honeymoon I'm going to have you with us in Waverton Street. That little front room above mine is being decorated for you—I chose such pretty curtains and a charming paper before I left London. So in the future, you see, darling, we shall not be separated; we shall be together, and I am sure it will make us both very happy."

As she said these words Lady Trent threw all that fascination and charm of which she was capable into her voice and manner. She did this purposely. Often and often she had been able to overcome a little hostility and disapproval in others by such means. She was aware of her own power and she used it now to win Olave.

But when she had finished speaking she saw that her words had not had the desired effect upon Olave who still stared at her with dark unbelieving eyes.

"Leave Aunt Aggie and Cheldon!" she cried, with a sob in her throat that she was not able to

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control; "you surely can't mean to be as cruel to me as all that! I knew you didn't care for me and that was why you would never have me with you—even Judy said there couldn't be any other reason, but I never thought you would want to *hurt* me!"

She uttered the words pitilessly as if the truth were being forced from her lips. Lady Trent drew back a little.

"I cruel? I hurt you? Olave, what are you saying?"

Had she come too late to overcome this hostility and dislike?

For an answer Olave burst into a fit of passionate weeping.

"I couldn't, oh, I couldn't!" she sobbed at last. "Why, I hardly know you—you're a stranger to me. And I love Aunt Aggie—it would kill me to go away from her."

Felicity said very gravely:

"Olave, it is possible that I may deserve these hard things you are saying to me. But I am your mother and I love you. And I am going to do what I consider will be best for us both."

Olave went on quietly sobbing, she made no effort to restrain her tears. At that moment she felt that she hated her mother. It was a wicked, wicked feeling, but then her mother was cruel to talk of taking her away from Cheldon. But her will was law, and Olave realized that neither she nor her aunt would be able to resist it in the long run. They would have to give in before this superior power.

"Now don't cry like a baby, Olave. I want you to try and look at it sensibly. You'll have lots of advantages in London that you could never have here." Lady Trent's voice was patient, but there was a touch of firmness in her manner that warned Olave she had better dry her tears.

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"Does—does Aunt Aggie know?" she asked, turning a tear-stained face to her mother.

"Yes, I have told her what I intend to do."

"Doesn't she mind?"

"Mind? Why should she mind? You are not her child, Olave. I am the only person who has any right to order your life."

Still it was a trifle discouraging to find that Olave was no less opposed to the scheme than Guy had been.

"In London," continued Felicity, "you will meet people; you will know girls of your own age, and you can attend classes. Here you see no one, and I am sure you are very backward."

"Meet people?" repeated Olave. "What sort of people?"

"My friends and Guy's. You hardly know any of my friends and naturally I have a great many. Guy also knows a number of interesting people—famous authors and artists."

"Authors?" Olave seized upon the word almost with avidity.

"Yes. Being one himself brings him into contact with literary people. I am sure when you once get accustomed to the change you will be very happy. You will find your new life interesting and agreeable."

Olave smiled, and in her smile there was something of contentment as if the future had disclosed rays of unsuspected light.

"Already you're beginning to think it may not be quite so horrible, aren't you?" said Felicity tenderly.

"Yes—yes," said Olave.

Lady Trent stooped and kissed her.

"You must never think I want to hurt you—I love you too much. But I am sure the time has come when we ought to know each other better."

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Olave returned the embrace. She saw in Felicity now someone who would lead her into other worlds. And there surely she would meet once more the man who had called her Primavera in the woods.

"Shall you be married here in Cheldon?" she asked.

"Oh, no, in London. I think perhaps at the Oratory. You see Guy isn't of the same religion as we are—he's a Roman Catholic. It won't make any difference to us, we shall go to church together without him. He isn't at all a strict one, so he won't bother his head about converting us!"

She was aware now that Olave was looking at her with a greatly increased interest.

"But how perfectly *thrilling* to be a Roman Catholic!" she said with a kind of suppressed excitement; "doesn't it really make you want to be one too? I think if I were very fond of a person, so fond that I was going to marry him, I should want to be of the same religion!"

"You forget that I am not a sentimental schoolgirl," said Lady Trent with a smile that had in it something of contempt. "I should never dream of changing my religion for any man."

But it came into her mind that if she had tried to know Guy better on that spiritual plane, which no one can entirely avoid, it would have helped him immeasurably. She was to bring him none of that youthful ardor for spiritual things which might have influenced him powerfully and made their love a much more beautiful thing. She was envious at that moment of Olave's youth, its freshness, its eagerness.

She and Guy were to be quite apart and separate in all the things that concerned religion. There might even come a day when he would need help and she would not be able to give it. And a younger woman—a girl perhaps a few years older than

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Olave—would have wished to be of the same religion, so that between his soul and hers there should be no dividing gulf.

"Perhaps he will sometimes tell me about it, I should like to know a little." Olave's eyes, now very bright and eager, were fixed upon her mother. Felicity's brows contracted in a faint frown. She was determined to avoid that contingency if possible.

"I don't think he'll care to speak of it," she said, "he isn't at all devout. I was even surprised that he was so anxious for the ceremony to take place in a Catholic church." She did not know quite why she said this, but she was again a little astonished at the interest Olave was displaying in the matter.

But, then, throughout the interview Olave had continually surprised her. What, for instance, had so rapidly reconciled her to the prospect of the impending change? Vehement passionate mutiny had suddenly given place to a joyful and eager acquiescence. She could not remember saying anything that could have so quickly produced this change in Olave's attitude.

When Agnes presently came out and joined the group under the cedars she found the mother and daughter together looking quite happy.

"Olave and I have had a long talk," said Felicity smiling. "And we've settled everything beautifully."

After tea Agnes Ardern was left alone with Olave. She was very anxious to hear the result of the interview. Whatever had taken place between Felicity and her child it was easy to see that perfect harmony now reigned.

"Aunt Aggie, I've something wonderful to tell you," said Olave.

Agnes came a little nearer.

"So you are glad your mother is going to be married again?" she asked.

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"Yes, but it isn't only that. She wants me to go and live with her in London!"

Miss Ardern's heart gave a sudden and sharp twinge of pain just as if a sword had pierced it. And yet how natural that a girl of Olave's age should delight in the prospect of a complete and exciting change. Had she learned, among other lessons, that her life at Cheldon was dull in its calm and ordered monotony? Had this man painted an agreeable picture of the world that lay beyond those grey hills that enclosed her home?

"Does the idea please you so much, Olave?" asked Miss Ardern.

"At first I cried and made a fuss," Olave confessed, "and behaved rather like a baby. I said I couldn't leave Cheldon and it was cruel to make me go away. But mother was most awfully sweet and kind, and she said she was sure I should like my new life and find it interesting, and then that I should meet all sorts of literary people and artists because Mr. Quinn is a writer and knows a great many authors. Oh, Aunt Aggie," clasping her hands together and gazing at Miss Ardern with bright excited eyes, "do you think I shall perhaps meet him there? For he told me he was an author and wrote novels."

Miss Ardern's face grew stern.

"Did you say all that to Felicity?" she inquired. "Did you explain why you wanted to go to London?"

"No," said Olave abashed, "I shouldn't like her to know. I've a kind of feeling she would be angry with me. And I don't want her to be angry now that she seems really beginning to care about me a little."

"I am sure you are not likely to meet this man in London," said Miss Ardern; "it is a very big place, and I think it most improbable that he should ever come to your mother's house. You ought not to

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wish to see him again, it would put you in an exceedingly awkward position. He is probably married by this time and has forgotten all about you. If you were to meet him in your mother's house it would only make you feel terribly ashamed of your past conduct. I am afraid he must have thought you had not had the bringing-up of a lady!"

Olave looked sullen and a little ashamed. She wondered why her aunt should be so disagreeably censorious over her beautiful and thrilling adventure. She almost wished now that she had confided in her mother instead of in Miss Ardern. For surely Lady Trent, who was soon going to be married herself, would never think it so wrong and wicked to fall in love.

The world was certainly a very puzzling place. But she knew, too, how lovely it could be on certain days when the sun was shining and the woods were green, and the bracken was springing up in Ardern's Knoll, and someone was waiting for you there under the trees.

A strange new tenderness toward her mother came into her heart. She felt that very soon she would learn to love her intensely. She was much more beautiful than Aunt Aggie, and she had such soft gentle ways.

Olave felt for the first time a faint sense of disloyalty toward her aunt.

CHAPTER XIII

MISS ARDERN LEARNS THE TRUTH

"WHAT an odd child Olave is," said Lady Trent to her sister that night at dinner. "But, perhaps, it's only because I'm beginning to discover how little I really know her. How strange,

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isn't it, that one should have so much to learn about one's own child. Does she ever seem odd to you, Aggie, or is it only my fancy?"

She leaned her chin on that pretty slim hand of hers and looked across the table at Miss Ardern.

The two sisters were alone. Outside the summer dusk was falling rapidly and there was no artificial light in the room. But even in the twilight Felicity Trent looked extraordinarily beautiful. She was wearing a very graceful dress of shimmering green with little bands of silver on it. Her eyes were brilliant. Happiness had beautified her, had even seemed to restore her very youth. Miss Ardern's eyes softened as they rested upon this radiant vision.

She answered cautiously,

"She has changed since her illness—of course that frequently happens, especially when there is suffering. But what exactly do you mean by odd, Fay?"

"I mean some remarks she made when I told her about my engagement."

"About your engagement?" repeated Agnes, with a growing sense of anxiety.

"Saying how wonderful it must be to be engaged to someone you love very much. She even said if she loved anyone very much she would want to be of the same religion. That was because I mentioned that Guy was a Catholic, although I told her that wouldn't make any difference either to her or to me. What can a child like that know about it?"

"I suppose nearly all girls indulge in silly thoughts about love," said Miss Ardern tranquilly.

"Yes, I suppose they do. But she said it in such a way that she almost convinced me she had had some actual experience of it," said Lady Trent, looking very hard at her sister. "And I don't see how that could have been possible. You've always been very careful, haven't you, Aggie? I hope the Mercer boys haven't been putting such ideas into her head."

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The moment certainly afforded Miss Ardern an admirable opportunity for disclosing Olave's secret to Olave's mother. Had the relations between mother and child been at all normal she would undoubtedly have considered it her duty to adopt some such course. But a second's reflection made her put aside the idea with a kind of obstinate resolution. Let Felicity find out what she could about her own daughter! It was by no means too late for her to win her confidence as well as her love. Olave was already beginning to come under the spell of her mother's charm and fascination. Probably before long the conquest would be complete. It was not for her to step in and imperil that new harmony.

"Some day perhaps you will be able to ask her what she meant," said Miss Ardern cautiously. "Girls of that age are often difficult—they need very wise handling."

"And then she changed so suddenly about going to London," continued Felicity; "at first she cried and behaved like a baby, and told me quite a number of unpleasant truths such as that I'd never cared for her and that sort of thing! I quite longed to slap her, Aggie, but I was really wonderfully patient, partly because I realized she was still weak and ill, and partly because I couldn't blame her for saying she didn't want to leave you! She would have been a heartless ungrateful little wretch if she hadn't minded leaving Cheldon. Then, all of a sudden, she changed her mind and positively jumped at the idea of going to live in London. I'm sure I hadn't said anything to make it sound so wildly attractive. What could have made her change like that?"

Felicity was evidently very far from suspicioning the truth.

In the dim light Miss Ardern's face was pale and a trifle stern. Her sister was trying to discover some clue to Olave's mysterious un-childlike utterances.

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She could have given it to her in half a dozen words. In after days she used to wonder whether this practical staightforward course would not have averted much misery. But she had not then come to full knowledge.

"By the way, I am going up to Waverton Street next week for ten days or a fortnight and I shall take Olave with me. I want Guy to see her and I must go up about my trousseau," said Lady Trent.

"Why can't Mr. Quinn come down and pay us a visit?" said Miss Ardern. "He ought to see your home, Fay, and the garden is looking lovely now. Besides I think London will be too hot for Olave in July, if she needs a change at all it will be better for her to go to the seashore."

"I couldn't possibly spare the time now to take her to the shore," said Lady Trent with decision.

"I could take her if you wished," said Agnes.

"You don't quite understand, Aggie. I want to have Olave with me, and the change will be excellent for her and get her out of invalid ways. We shall learn to know each other when we are alone there together as we could never do here. She must begin to realize as soon as possible that she must look to me in the future and not to you, to feel that she is my child and not yours. It will be a kind of trial trip."

When Felicity spoke in that tone it was useless to remonstrate and Agnes wisely remained silent.

"Of course, I asked Guy to come down to stay with us but he didn't seem at all keen about it. By the way, Aggie, he knows Cheldon. He has stayed at the Park with Lady Mercer, and I think he must have been actually there while we were in Devonshire just before Olave was ill. He declares I never told him we lived at Cheldon—I am sure I must have, but I suppose he wasn't listening. What is the matter, Aggie?"

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It was too dark now for her to see her sister's face at all distinctly, but the shadows were surely playing strange fantastic tricks with it. There seemed to Felicity's imagination to be something of actual horror in Agnes Ardern's expression.

"Nothing. What should be the matter, Fay?" she said in a cold, constrained tone. "But how odd that he should have been staying at the Mercers'." Her eyes wide-open were fastened upon Felicity's face. She held all the clues in her own hands now; there was no need to go and ask Lady Mercer for the name of her guest. The man who had insulted Olave with his kisses and his love in Ardern's Knoll could be no other than the man whom Felicity had promised to marry. And how was she to leave them both in ignorance? How was she to keep it first from Felicity and then from Olave? She felt a little sick as if she had received a sudden shock of bad news.

"After all it isn't so very odd. Guy has heaps of friends I know nothing about. He reminded me once of how little he knew of the details of my life. And I could not quite understand why he seemed to dislike the thought of coming to Cheldon. But men so often have queer moods—I did not pay much attention to it. I suppose if I had been a sentimental girl I should have cried at his refusal to come down here this week. Instead of which I'm perfectly happy with you and Olave. I suppose the reason is that I feel so sure of Guy. And our engagement is to be such a short one, there can be no time for silly misunderstandings and disagreements."

She was purposely disregarding the slight discord that had crept into their discussion about Olave's future, for she was inclined to dismiss the matter as unimportant. She was sure that Guy would be charmed with Olave—with her beauty and intelligence.

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But Agnes Ardern scarcely heard what her sister was saying. She was almost stupefied with horror and surprise at the disaster which seemed to be approaching them all on swift feet. Would Lady Trent ever forgive Quinn when she learned the truth of how his days at Cheldon had been spent? Would she ever forgive her daughter? And Olave—Olave would be crushed between the upper and the nether millstone. There was no chance of Olave's being able to escape unscathed.

"Let's go into the library," said Lady Trent rising and switching on the electric light. "We've been sitting here simply ages. Why, Aggie, how pale you are to-night!" She linked her arm in her sister's. "You mustn't fret about Olave, you know. I'm going to make her perfectly happy, and we shall often run down and stay with you. I was afraid you'd feel badly about it at first, but I know you think in your heart I'm doing it for the best!"

With one of her impulsive gestures she bent her head and gave Agnes one of her rare caresses. To her surprise she found that her sister's face was very cold.

So, eluding and escaping observation, Olave Trent had repeated in her own sheltered and guarded person something of her mother's first clandestine experience of love. And with the additional complication that whereas Digby Trent's intentions had been perfectly honorable throughout, Guy Quinn was already the betrothed of another woman. And that woman, through the machinations of a surely malevolent fate, was Olave's own mother. Was the man so blind that he had never discerned the striking resemblance between them? Or had Olave in her sweet youth failed completely to remind him of the more mature and sophisticated beauty of Felicity?

Agnes had no definite plan in her mind. She only

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felt that at all costs she must prevent that journey of Olave's to London in the following week. She must not be allowed to meet Guy Quinn again without a word of warning.

Agnes Ardern had a practical mind. She could coldly and deliberately envisage a disagreeable truth, nor was she one to try to deceive herself about its essential fundamental importance. She was perfectly aware that great issues were at stake, and that probably for the second time Felicity would be left bankrupt of faith and happiness. She had been no wiser in her second choice than in her first. But, strange to say, Miss Ardern's first concern was not for Felicity, but for Olave. It was the first time perhaps that she had deliberately placed her niece before her sister. But Felicity was no longer very young; she had passed through fierce and stormy experiences, and a fresh wound could never hold for her the poignant agony of the first stab. Olave, on the contrary, was little more than a child in years, and she had been an absolute child in thought and outlook until a few weeks ago when this man had carelessly and wantonly stepped into her life and awakened the love that was in her heart.

He had made Olave believe that he loved her despite that engagement of his which perhaps was not then fully ratified—he must have been on the very eve of receiving Felicity's tardily sent letter of acceptance which had cost so much consideration. He had kissed her lips! At the thought of those traitorous kisses Miss Ardern almost boiled with rage and anger. She would have liked to avenge every one of them. She longed to place Guy Quinn in the dock and convict him of a perfidy that should set him outside the pale of all honorable men. And out of that love affair, conducted with such prudent and scrupulous caution, Olave had emerged deplor-

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ably changed. Her whole thoughts, the whole purpose of her life, were strongly concentrated upon one thing, her intense desire and determination to meet this man again. And how simple and cruelly inevitable that meeting would prove to be, Agnes Ardern had just learned.

Oh, at all costs it must be frustrated! And in her endeavor to stave off the revelation, even if only for a time, Agnes Ardern knew that she would have to deal with two very obstinate and resolute people whose one wish would be to oppose her.

Suddenly some words of Felicity's returned sharply to her memory. Olave must have learned from Quinn that he was a Catholic. This accounted for her utterance—to Felicity so enigmatic—in regard to the desirability of being of the same religion as the person beloved. Whichever way she looked she saw fresh difficulties and complications. It never, however, occurred to her to question the reality of Guy's love for her sister. This philandering with Olave in Ardern's Knoll had meant nothing at all as far as Quinn was concerned. He had found a girl eager and ready to listen to him. Miss Ardern had no pity for him at all. Whatever punishment might be meted out to him in the future at the hands of Felicity, it would at least be incommensurable with his deserts.

Lady Trent's voice struck across her thoughts.

"Dear old Aggie, you are very dull to-night. And just now you really looked as if you had seen a ghost, one of the unpleasant gory kind! Do be nice to me, I'm so happy. I realize now that I have never been happy all these years."

"Dear Fay, I'm so glad you are happy," murmured Agnes Ardern.

The old tradition triumphed. She thought to herself:

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"Olave must be told and Felicity must never know."

If only that were possible!

CHAPTER XIV

OLAVE GOES TO LONDON

MISS Ardern longed to postpone the evil day until Olave was stronger and had more perfectly recovered from her severe illness, and would be thus better able to endure the shock in silence and with that fortitude for which she so earnestly hoped. If she could only prevent Felicity from carrying out her plan of taking Olave to London with her, a little respite might in this way be mercifully obtained. In the days that followed Agnes even found herself wishing that the girl might have some slight relapse or complication that would effectually prevent her from making a journey. But this was extremely unlikely. The prospect had become so delightful to Olave that her very pleasure in it had hastened her recovery. She had been in a constant state of rapturous half-suppressed excitement ever since that conversation with her mother on the lawn. And her newly-aroused devotion to Lady Trent deepened daily. It sometimes even happened that Miss Ardern felt herself left out in the cold. It was not only that Olave excluded her, but that Felicity was also preoccupied with her young daughter and with the novelty of taking up her long-neglected maternal duties. Agnes had little opportunity of speaking to Olave alone. The two went for daily drives together, and Agnes was never invited to accompany

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them. Slowly but surely Felicity was achieving the first steps toward a complete separation between aunt and niece. And could she not always make this excuse, that Agnes had been the first to point out to her how wrong she had been to leave Olave for so long to the care of another?

Olave threw off her invalid ways with marvelous rapidity. She was determined to be sufficiently well to accompany her mother to London. Mademoiselle was given a holiday and had gone away for the present so as to leave Olave perfectly free. Felicity found her task surprisingly easy; it is probable that she had never made such a swift conquest of anyone as of her own daughter. And how perfect the surrender had been she knew when one day Olave impulsively put her arms round her neck and whispered: "Oh, mother, I do love you! More than anyone else in the world!" Felicity was touched by the embrace, by the spontaneous words. She let Olave cling to her, and kissed her many times, then she said simply:

"We ought to have known each other long ago. But we must make up for it now." All that day she was very quiet and tender to Olave, as if the emotion had not quite passed away.

After dinner that evening they were all sitting in the library when nine o'clock struck. It was the first time that Olave had dined downstairs since her illness, and Miss Ardern, fearing that she might be tired, said gently:

"It is your bed-time, Olave, dear."

She had always said this for a long time past when the appointed hour for Olave's withdrawal had come.

To-night to her astonishment Olave turned to her mother as if for confirmation, and Felicity, without looking at Agnes, said:

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"It's much too lovely a night to waste in bed! If Olave doesn't feel tired she can stay with me till ten."

She slipped her arm round Olave with a gesture of tenderness.

Agnes Ardern went on with her knitting in silence. Once she glanced at those two faces—so near together and so strangely alike—and her calm eyes were full of a new pity. She recognized her sister's determination to arrange everything for Olave now, down to the smallest detail of her daily life. And she knew that the girl was now wholly and completely on her mother's side.

It made her fear more than ever to speak to Olave, to warn her of what most surely and inevitably lay ahead of her. She was conscious of a divided duty. There were moments when she believed her only course was to leave Olave entirely to her mother, and let her discover about Quinn in the ordinary course of events.

At ten o'clock Olave rose and kissed her mother warmly and her aunt dutifully and went upstairs. She had grown very much since her illness and now looked unusually tall. But she was slight, and graceful in her movements. They both watched her as she went out of the room.

When the door had closed Felicity said:

"Aggie, dear, I hope you didn't think me a brute just now for telling Olave that she might sit up? You see I want to have complete control over her. She must obey me—only me." There was decision in her voice.

Then, as if to make amends for any hardness in the words, she stretched out a slim hand and laid it on her sister's knee.

Agnes touched the hand with her own.

"Of course I didn't think you a brute, Fay, dear.

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You were quite right to remind me that I have given up taking charge of Olave now."

"You'll be saved these little pin-pricks by my having Olave alone with me in London," said Lady Trent, who plainly perceived that the readjustment would never be satisfactorily completed at Cheldon, since it would involve both confusion and pain. "I know it must hurt you, Aggie, but I can't help it. I'm so sure it's my duty that I have to harden my heart and think only of the one thing! You mustn't be angry with me or think me cold and ungrateful. You've done so much for Olave!"

"I am never angry with you, Fay," said Miss Ardern gravely. "I only wish you had taken Olave to live with you when she was a baby."

"Yes, I was afraid at first I had come too late. But that fear has quite passed. Even you must see, I think, how absolutely devoted to me Olave has become!"

"Yes, and I am very glad of it, Fay." Agnes put aside her knitting. "My only wish is that you would leave her here just through the summer. Then perhaps in the autumn—when you come back—" she paused. It was a desperate pitiful attempt to gain a reprieve for Olave, indeed for them all.

Felicity frowned.

"Dear Aggie, surely a mother knows best what's good for her own child? I really must have her all to myself for these next few weeks without any interference from anyone. We must get more used to each other. I should be ashamed for Guy to see how unintimate we are! It's absurd for a woman not to know if her daughter takes sugar in her tea or not!"

Although she spoke lightly Miss Ardern felt that Felicity was extremely serious behind those carelessly uttered words. She had evidently given the matter much careful consideration.

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Agnes made another attempt.

"But if she is to live with you permanently in October I think you might let her be with me until then."

It was always difficult for her to put forth a reason that was in some measure false, to convey an impression that was not a strictly accurate one.

"You mustn't really be jealous, Aggie. Of course, I know you will feel parting from her very much. But it's no use postponing it, my dear, you wouldn't feel it any the less next October. You see I want Olave to care for me more than anyone in the world. It is my right—my right as her mother." Her lips closed firmly on the words.

She did not perceive the little shudder that passed through Agnes' frame, making her limbs tremble.

"I am not at all jealous, Fay. Have you ever known me to be jealous? But I've had the care of her so long I feel I know more about her health than you do."

"Olave will soon be perfectly well. She has my constitution, and up till now she has had splendid health. Her cough is better, and, I daresay, I shall take her to a good doctor in London. In any case her health is my affair now."

Miss Ardern saw that her poor little attempt at intervention had proved quite futile. And would she succeed any better with Olave if she approached the subject to her? She seemed to picture all three actors in the little drama rushing headlong toward irremediable and inevitable disaster. Should she leave them to themselves since now they showed her they had no need of her suggestions? Or should she tell Olave the truth and urge her to bear it with fortitude and in silence?

Although she considered this the only feasible course she shrank from it more and more. If she

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adopted it there might be a scene. Olave might refuse to accompany her mother to London, Felicity would demand explanations, and probably arrive at a very fair estimate of the truth. And she would be certain to blame Agnes for having precipitated the catastrophe without first informing her of the whole affair. There were moments when Agnes actually contemplated writing to Guy Quinn.

There was, however, one thing with which she had not reckoned, and that was the swift and sudden manner in which Lady Trent was wont to form and carry out her plans. It had always been thus with her, and yet Agnes had believed that on this occasion she would give her a little notice before whisking Olave off to Waverton Street. She herself went to Cheltenham one morning to make a few purchases on Olave's behalf in preparation for her visit to town. Felicity would naturally expect to find her daughter equipped adequately in all the dainty details of her toilette. During her short journey thither Agnes' mind was uncomfortably preoccupied with the prospect of telling Olave that the man she had met in Ardern's Knoll and the Guy Quinn her mother was about to marry were one and the same person. She must not delay, and she assured herself that she would not put off the evil hour any longer. She must find an opportunity of telling her as soon as possible after her return home. It was no easy matter as Olave was such a little adoring slave she grudged every moment she spent away from her mother.

But Fate abruptly took the initiative from Miss Ardern's hands. When she returned home late in the afternoon she was greeted by the news that Lady Trent had already left Cheldon taking Olave with her. There was a little scribbled note of explanation from Felicity, saying that the lawyers

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had telegraphed for her to go up on very urgent business connected with settlements. She had taken Olave with her rather than leave her to follow later, and her little comment on the point did nothing to temper the blow to Agnes nor to mitigate that anxiety which seemed to take possession of her.

"I think it's really better that there should be no tiresome good-bys. You know how I hate them, and I'm going to teach Olave never to indulge in such useless sentiment. We shall not be away so very long this time, and there's nothing to make a tragedy about, you dear sentimental old darling!"

Agnes Ardern's heart sank when she thought of Olave. She had even a moment's mad impulse to follow the pair to London, and tell them both the whole story and leave ensuing events in their hands. But she quickly perceived that such a course would be both imprudent and impossible. When she went to bed that night she shed the first tears she shed for many years.

CHAPTER XV

THE MEETING OF GUY AND OLAVE

THE pretty little house in Waverton Street, which she had not seen for some years, enchanted Olave. Comfortable as Cheldon Manor was, it undoubtedly lacked the simple equipment of modern luxury that characterized her mother's London abode. It was all on a small scale and there was nothing that was superfluous or complicated, but it was exquisitely planned and never lost for a moment its atmosphere of almost austere perfection.

The white bedroom which had been entirely re-

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decorated and furnished for her was a delight to Olave, who saw in this a fresh proof of her mother's devotion and forethought. Felicity gave her several costly and beautiful gifts and few girls of her age could have remained long impervious to the indulgence and petting which now surrounded her. She was so happy during the first week she spent away from Cheldon, and she had such a delicious novel sense of liberty and escape from bondage that she forgot to miss Aunt Agnes, and wondered how she could ever have disliked the prospect of leaving the Manor.

For during that first week all went well and smoothly—so smoothly, indeed, that Miss Ardern, hearing of no ugly revelations, was lulled into a kind of false peace. But the real truth was that Guy Quinn was out of London. He knew that Felicity might come up any day and that she would probably be accompanied by her daughter and, although he had as yet no positive knowledge of Olave's identity, the mere prospect of ascertaining the truth made him nervously incapable of facing the situation until it could no longer be avoided.

He made many excuses for his absence and Lady Trent accepted them all. She was always the least exacting of women and she felt no surprise at his evident wish to spend his last days of freedom with his old friends. She knew that he was popular and was liked by both men and women and had in consequence a large number of friends. And she was too busy to miss him much. There was all her own trousseau to be ordered, and there was Olave's wardrobe to be replenished. She received also a number of wedding-presents, and her evenings were often spent in writing letters of acknowledgment and thanks.

She kept Olave constantly with her, and already

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the two were becoming not only friendly but intimate in countless little ways after the manner of persons who are nearly related to each other. Olave liked the new sensation of being important to someone; she found the life with her mother more free and less restricted than the one she had left. Miss Ardern's training of the girl had been careful and meticulous; she never let anything pass unnoticed or uncensured if she considered it her duty to mention it. Felicity, however, never indulged in mild and gentle reproofs of the kind. She was capable of flashing out angrily if anything displeased her, as she had done when she rebuked Olave for rudeness on her first arrival at Cheldon that summer. But it was nly very rarely that her anger was thus aroused, and Olave soon discovered that her efforts to please her mother met with ready affectionate response. Felicity was indeed more like an elder sister than a mother to her in those days. Olave talked to her freely and naturally, sure of a sympathetic listener. And on her side Lady Trent was delighted with the success of her scheme. She had won her daughter's love with scarcely any effort. It had been there waiting for her all these years and now she had only to step in and reap the harvest. And in her heart there was a faint sense of triumph when she thought of Aggie.

Olave had sometimes been very near to telling her mother of the episode of the summer. She knew that as long as she withheld the knowledge from her there would be something wanting to that perfect intimacy that was springing up between them. Yet, on the very brink of confession when Felicity's arms were round her and she felt light kisses on her hair and face, an instinctive fear made her draw back. She hesitated in the first place because she feared to diminish her mother's approval. She felt that

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if Lady Trent should disapprove of her conduct it would certainly reduce her to a depth of shame and humiliation which Agnes Ardern's kind and temperate words had never been able to achieve. And Olave knew that there would be no escape—she would have to accept loyally her mother's verdict even if it were an adverse one. Lady Trent was a woman of the world, she knew far better than Agnes what girls might do and what they might not. Olave did not wish to lose caste in her mother's eyes, or to forego any of that beautiful and tender sympathy that Felicity offered in such abundance. But some day when their intimacy was so firmly established that nothing could jeopardize it Olave made up her mind that she would tell her all that had happened. She would pray for her forgiveness. Only she would not as yet risk endangering the perfection of their happiness.

Felicity unconsciously banished from her daughter's mind that perpetual and rather morbid contemplation of the episode of the summer. The remembrance of the man who had passed so convulsively across her life began to fade a little. This new love had in a sense taken the place of that one that had vanished. The girl's heart was craving not only for love but for the expression, the gesture of love. And Felicity, unknowing, filled the gap created by that mysterious and beautiful stranger who had come and conquered and disappeared. She was the best and most wholesome medicine her daughter could possibly have had at that important crisis of her life. For despite all her apparent frivolity and carelessness, there was something *au fond* extremely wholesome and wise about Felicity Trent. She had a broader vision, a more experienced outlook than Agnes Ardern; she was disillusioned without being in the least bitter; she felt very keenly that modern sense of revolt against any kind

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of morbid sentiment. She had a healthy influence over her daughter. And Olave was both eager and ready to accept her opinions, to bow to her authority.

Neither of them suspected the proximity of the serpent in this little Eden of happiness.

Felicity had even forgotten her first fear that Guy might be alarmed at finding such a grown-up prospective stepdaughter, and that he might not in consequence take to Olave. Now she only thought: "I am sure he will like her for my sake. In many ways she's so like me." It was a likeness that was accentuated each day that they spent in each other's company. Olave instinctively and almost unconsciously adopted her mother's little ways, used her language and expressions, tried to imitate her movements and gestures.

Lady Trent found herself longing for the time when Guy and Olave should be introduced to each other. She felt that her happiness would not be quite perfect until a successful meeting had taken place between them. She became eager for Quinn to return to London, not only because she had seen so little of him since their engagement but also because she wished him to know her daughter.

It was, therefore, with great pleasure that she received a telegram one morning announcing his arrival in town. Felicity at once despatched a little note inviting him to come to luncheon. It was just after she had received his affirmative answer that a message came from her lawyers asking her to go down to their office in the Strand immediately.

She ran quickly up to Olave's room. The girl was putting on her hat for they had arranged to go out together that morning.

"Darling, we can't go after all. The lawyers have telephoned for me. It's such a bore to-day of all days when Guy is coming to lunch."

Olave looked disappointed. She never accom-

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panied her mother when she went down to hold those interminable business discussions with the solicitors.

"So you must stay in, dear, and entertain Guy if he comes before I get back. Be very nice to him. You know I've been longing for you two to know each other."

Felicity looked brilliantly lovely and happy that morning. She had almost the aspect of a girl. She drew Olave to her and kissed her.

"I want you to like each other!" she said. "Put on your new white dress with the embroidered blouse and tell Hortense to do your hair. You know how much first impressions count with some men." To herself she was thinking: "I am sure he will think her charming. She's improved even in this short time."

To her astonishment Olave, who was not often demonstrative, flung her arms round her neck and pressed her cheek to hers.

"Oh, mother, darling, I don't want him to come! I like being here alone with you. I'm so afraid he'll take you away from me—that he'll hate having me always here."

Felicity was touched and pleased but aloud she only said: "Don't be a goose, Olave. There's plenty of room for you both. But I promise you he shan't come between us."

She took Olave's face in her two slim hands and kissed her with a deliberate tenderness.

"Darling Olave," she murmured, in her softest voice.

They went downstairs together and after a little delay Lady Trent started off. Olave went back quietly to her room. She felt nervous and excited but very happy.

When the hour of luncheon drew near Olave made a careful toilette under the experienced auspices

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of Hortense, who arranged her abundant dark hair with skilled accustomed fingers. While these preparations were in progress she began to feel a little nervous dread of meeting this man who was so soon to be her stepfather. She thought it was a little strange that her mother had never shown her a photograph of him, and she could therefore form no mental picture of him at all. She hoped that he would arrive later or that her mother might return sooner than she expected, so that she would not have to receive him alone. She hardly knew if he were young or old, dark or fair. Lady Trent very rarely mentioned him. She was a reserved woman, and she had felt a certain embarrassment in speaking of him to her young daughter. Olave had wisely refrained from questioning her on the subject. She only wished that the marriage were not to take place quite so soon so that she might have enjoyed a few more delightful weeks alone with her mother, surrounded by that loving indulgent atmosphere which seemed to have thawed all the cold places of her heart. It was such a thrilling life compared to all that she had previously known. At Cheldon she had always been treated more or less like a child, and Felicity was the first to treat her like a dear companion, almost an equal. She felt resentful when she remembered her aunt's quiet gentle admonitions: "Olave, dear, you mustn't do that," or "Olave, I can't have you speaking like that," or on those rarer occasions when Miss Ardern was seriously and definitely annoyed her stern, "Olave, if this happens again I shall punish you." In the delicious freedom of her present life Olave felt as if she could not readily return to that old rigid régime which Miss Ardern had thought so necessary.

She went down presently to the drawing-room. It contained such charming things, old silver, china, in-

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laid furniture, pastel and water-color drawings and etchings, that she loved an excuse for prowling about alone there, examining her mother's treasures. To-day she felt a little restless; she could not sit down quietly and read a book until Mr. Quinn came. She felt as if her future lay in his hands, that if he did not like her she would have to return to the dull monotony of Cheldon. She must try to please him.

"But I'm nearly sure to hate him," thought Olave to herself.

This thought had scarcely framed itself in her mind when she heard the door open and the footman's voice said:

"Her ladyship isn't back yet, sir, but I'll tell Miss Olave you are here."

Olave was standing near the window in the back drawing-room looking out on to a small square garden in which nothing grew except a few dusty-looking shrubs. She turned quickly hearing advancing footsteps. Under the archway that opened over the whole width of the inner room she saw a familiar figure standing very still in an expectant attitude. Their eyes met, and it seemed as if that single exchanged glance had turned them both to stone.

The shock of seeing Quinn so unexpectedly made Olave feel physically faint. She felt all the blood rush away from her heart and her knees and hands trembled. He had been so constantly in her thoughts, as well as in her dreams, that to come face to face with him thus made her almost feel as if her very longing to see him had evoked his actual physical presence. No least suspicion of the truth had so far forced its way into her mind. After a moment's pause she ran toward him with cheeks that were no longer pale and eyes that shone brilliantly. Her hands were outstretched in eager welcome.

"Oh, so it's you!" Her voice was not quite

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steady. "I was expecting Mr. Quinn, he is to come to lunch and mother isn't back yet. I never expected to see *you!*"

"Oh, my God, Primavera."

Guy's face was ashen grey; his hands dropped nervously to his sides. He stood looking at her.

But Olave's joy was so great that she noticed nothing amiss

"Oh, you can't think how I've hoped and hoped that we might meet here! Mr. Quinn, who is going to marry mother, is an author too, and I felt so sure you would know each other. And I've wanted so much to tell you how sorry I was I couldn't come that last day but I was very ill. How did you know I was here? I never thought somehow that we should meet so soon."

But Guy did not speak, and he took no notice of the proffered hand nor of the glowing little face uplifted to his as if, despite all Agnes Ardern's rebukes and warnings, she was expecting once more to feel his kiss.

She took alarm from his continued silence, from the lack of all response.

"Why, what's the matter? Aren't you glad to see me again? Perhaps you come to see Mr. Quinn; he isn't here yet but he's coming, he ought to be here very soon." Again she looked up at him. "Aren't you going to kiss me? Oh, if you only knew how I've *longed* to see you again!"

"Oh, Primavera," said Guy at last in a hollow tone, "don't you see? Don't you understand? I —I *am* Guy Quinn. And you?"

She fell back step by step, a slowly-growing horror in her eyes that had suddenly become dull and somber. Half the room divided them; it seemed to him that she was shrinking from him appalled.

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"I am Olave Trent," she said, and now her voice was steady and rang out clearly.

Some instinct of pride made her hold her head very erect.

"And I am going to marry your mother," said Guy.

"So it was mother whom you loved all the time," said Olave.

It seemed to him that, child though she was, she was an accusing figure bent upon his punishment. Would he have to pay a bitter price for each one of those idle kisses, for each one of those words of love? He felt as if he were looking at her across a gulf as wide, as irremediable, as the very gulf of death.

"Why did you make me love you?" she asked, and there was curiosity as well as anger in her voice.

"Because I am a cad and a scoundrel," he said bitterly; "but I may at least tell you this. I meant no harm, I hadn't the least suspicion who you were until after I had left Cheldon. Your mother had never mentioned that her home was here. We were happy—were we not?—in those summer days." There was something of apology now in his voice, something also that seemed to be a demand for her pity and forgiveness. "I am not sure that even if I could I should wish that we had never seen each other before. I am not sure that I would wish *any part* of it undone—any word unsaid!"

Olave was silent. His words still had power to stir the very fibers of her being. But, young and inexperienced as she was, she knew the situation thus created to be an impossible one. She must go away; she must never see him again, never hear his voice. And in time God would let her forget. Now she had only a longing, so fierce that it re-

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sembled pain, for the security of Cheldon, the grey peace of its ancient walls.

"What are you going to do?" he asked in desperation. "If you keep silence—You *have* kept silence, I suppose?" His voice was harsh.

"To my mother—yes," she answered. "Not to my aunt. I told her because during my illness she seemed to guess something." Her eyes regarded him now quite steadily. "I am going home. I shall leave you to tell my mother." She moved toward the door.

"Do you think I am going to stay here now?" demanded Guy fiercely. "You are giving me credit for more courage than I possess. I must have time at least to think things out. Surely, you can invent some excuse to tell your mother why I have not stayed. Tell her I will look in this evening if possible. If you feel compelled to tell her the truth I cannot prevent you. But I am not going to stay here to meet Felicity now."

He stumbled past her on his way to the door. She did not try to detain him, but stood there as motionless as a statue. She did not even look at him as he passed. On the landing he turned back for a moment.

"After all I believe I'm pretty safe in your hands," he said.

He did not wait for an answer but disappeared down the stairs, and a few minutes later she heard the front door shut sharply behind him.

When he had gone all her courage seemed suddenly to leave her. She sank into a low chair and hid her face in her hands. She endured then a sense of shame and humiliation that seemed to possess almost the bitterness of death. But one fact stood out quite clearly amid the general confusion. She loved Guy Quinn. No longer with the

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ardor and innocence of a child, but with the dreadful disillusioned love of a woman who knows that she has fixed her affections upon something supremely worthless. He was a coward, he could not face Felicity; he had left everything in her hands. He had not even the courage to remain to see her mother. There had been something ignoble in his exit.

He had come and gone, and he had broken all her beautiful dreams to pieces. But she loved him. Yes, to her eternal shame.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FLIGHT OF OLAVE

Less than half an hour later Felicity came into the room bringing with her a cheerful little bustle of greeting and soft laughter. The servant had told her that Mr. Quinn had come and was with Miss Olave in the drawing-room, and she had expected to find them together, confident with her usual optimism that they would have already made friends. To her astonishment she found Olave sitting there alone. Although the girl rose to welcome her there was something in her changed aspect that smote Felicity with a strange feeling of anxiety. Where was Guy? And why was Olave here alone? Had they quarreled?

"Why, Olave! What have you done with Guy? They told me he had come."

Olave looked almost wildly at her mother. She wanted to throw her arms around her and make a full confession of all her previous acquaintance with Guy. But she quickly banished the thought. She

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had a curious conviction that if she spoke she would only destroy her mother's happiness, as well as Guy's, as well as her own. If she kept silence, if they would but let her go home quietly, she would be the only one to suffer. She was well aware that in the last hour she had left every atom of her childhood behind her. It was as another woman that she faced her mother now.

"Yes, he was here," she said, in a cold controlled voice. "But he went away—he found he could not stop. He told me to make an excuse—he said that perhaps he would come in this evening."

"I—I don't understand," said Felicity.

Had anything happened? Why had he gone away? Was there any real reason for his rather consistent avoidance of her during the past weeks of their engagement? She began to see his negligence in a new sinister light.

"Well, I think you might have persuaded him to remain until I came back," said Felicity rather crossly. She was definitely disappointed, and in some obscure way she was inclined to blame Olave for his abrupt departure. "You told him that I was expected back at any moment, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Olave.

"I am afraid you were not nice to him. I hope you were not very *farouche?*" inquired Felicity, who now began to fear that Olave had displayed something of that jealousy she had revealed to her earlier in the day.

"I don't think that I was *farouche.*"

"It is very tiresome," said Felicity, "and I think you might really have persuaded him to stay just to see me, even if he could not remain for lunch. How long was he here?"

"Only a few minutes. Perhaps five," said Olave.

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She answered her mother's question in a dull mechanical tone.

"Well, we must go down to lunch," said Lady Trent.

The meal passed in silence. Olave ate very little, but she forced herself to swallow some food, although it threatened to choke her, because she was afraid that her mother might observe her lack of appetite. Lady Trent was, however, too preoccupied with thoughts of Guy to pay any attention to her daughter. What on earth did he mean by this strange behavior? She had not seen him for a fortnight and now he had left the house without staying to greet her. It would be necessary to receive some explanation of this extraordinary conduct. If he were tired of the engagement—if he had discovered that he had made a mistake—he had only to say so. She would be very sorry, but at least she would not break her heart. She had Olave—she would not be alone. There would be no necessity to return to that old solitary, aimless, roving life that she had led for the past sixteen years. She would have Olave, and Olave would make up for a great deal. Only, even Olave did not seem quite herself to-day. She was looking white and exhausted. Yet this morning she had seemed in the most splendid health and spirits. What had caused the change in her?

"You are quite sure that Guy did not say anything else? He did not give any other message you have forgotten to tell me?" said Felicity, when the meal had dragged to its close.

"No, there was no other message," said Olave.

"You have no idea why he went?" pursued Felicity.

"He seemed in a hurry—he did not stop to say much," said Olave, miserably conscious of equivocation.

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"I suppose he will explain it all when he comes this evening," said Felicity, rising from her seat and going toward the door. "What are you going to do this afternoon, Olave? Hortense can take you if you wish to go out. I am so tired with my long morning that I must have a siesta. It's too hot for anything."

Olave followed her mother out of the room.

"Should you mind very much if I went back to Cheldon?" she said.

Felicity stopped short in the hall and faced her daughter in astonishment.

"Why should you want to go back to Cheldon? I thought you were quite happy here with me!" She was irritated at the request, following so soon upon Guy's little defalcation. Was Olave going to fail her, too? No, she would never permit that. Olave was her own child and she could at least exact obedience from her. "What put such an idea as that into your head?" she asked.

"I—I want to go," said Olave dully. "It's very hot here and now that Mr. Quinn has come back you won't want me." She stopped.

Then she *was* jealous? And she had perhaps betrayed something of her jealousy to Guy, thereby precipitating his departure. Felicity regarded her daughter with some severity.

"My dear, you are absurd, and it would be very wrong of me to encourage you in such a caprice. You must stay here and learn to accustom yourself to these new conditions. At any rate, I simply can't have Guy worried with your silly little emotions."

"I can't stay—I can't stay—" said Olave wildly. "You must let me go. I'm really happier at Cheldon."

Felicity was now genuinely alarmed.

"Has this anything to do with what Guy said to

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you or what you said to him this morning, Olave?"

Olave shook her head. "Please let me go back to Aunt Aggie!"

Her voice was raised now and the sharp entreaty seemed to echo through the house.

"My dear child, I simply can't let you make a scene here. Come up to your room, you are overdone with the heat. You must lie down for a couple of hours, and after tea I'll take you for a drive." She laid her hand on Olave's arm and drew her gently but firmly toward the stairs.

The habit of obedience, carefully trained and fostered during the long years of Miss Ardern's sway, stood Olave in good stead now. She accompanied her mother quietly enough and let her take her into her bedroom. Felicity pulled down the blinds.

"There, you must try to sleep. You'll feel better after a good rest. If you like you shall dine upstairs to-night so that you need not see Mr. Quinn again. I'm sure he would be horrified if he knew the effect he has had upon you." Her tone was light but decisive. "You mustn't be hysterical, Olave. I have the greatest contempt for hysterical women. You must learn to be perfectly controlled."

She went out of the room, and for about half an hour Olave lay obediently upon her bed with closed eyes. But, although her body was very still, her mind was extraordinarily active. She was making plans with a swiftness, a precision, that would have astonished Felicity if she could have had a glimpse into her daughter's mind. One thing was quite clear to Olave—she must go back to Cheldon as soon as possible. She had a kind of aching nostalgia to find herself there once more, to feel the quiet sheltering presence of Agnes Ardern to whom she could relate without reserve the calamity that had come

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upon her. There were still many things that baffled her, especially with regard to Guy. He had said plainly that he would not wish anything undone of all that had passed between them—the words of love, the kisses, the stolen secret meetings in Ardern's Knoll. This avowal almost assured her that he did in some mysterious way love her. He had been appalled to make the discovery that she was Felicity's own daughter; it was indeed a complication that the most malevolent fate could scarcely have devised for the punishment of his perfidy, his dishonor. But there had been something in his eyes and in his voice, as he uttered those miserable and cowardly words, that yet had told her she was dear to him. And it was this that quickened her resolve to go away. She felt as if her very presence in Waverton Street were a subtle wrong to her mother. She loved Felicity, and to save her from the cruel knowledge of the truth it was necessary to pretend that she did not love her, that she wished to go away. There was no other course open to her. She could not stay here day after day, seeing Guy, listening to his voice. No one could ask that of her. It was altogether too hard and difficult a thing. No, she must go away quietly. She must go this very afternoon—now.

Olave rose and dressed herself in a dark blue serge coat and skirt and a straw hat that matched it in color. She put a few things into a small handbag and crept quietly down the stairs. Her mother's door was shut as she went softly past it. She breathed again when she had reached the hall in safety. There was no one about. She turned the handle of the door and slipped out into the street. The sun was shining fiercely and the pavements felt hot to her feet. But she was safely out of the house now, the most difficult part of her journey

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was already accomplished. In Park Lane she hailed a taxi and was soon traveling swiftly toward Paddington Station. She intended to take the first train—any train—that went to Oxford. She could wait there for the local train to Cheldon. Once out of London there would be little fear of pursuit or capture. She did, however, remember to send a telegram to Lady Trent on her arrival at Paddington. It contained only a few words:

Have gone back to Cheldon. Please forgive me. Your loving Olave.

Her mind had never been so clear. She bought her ticket, paid the porter, took her seat in the train in a composed perfectly mechanical manner. Further than her arrival at home she could not see. She had an idea that Aunt Aggie would be able to advise her as to the next step. But she would be quite safe there from any fear of meeting Guy. The thought of Guy weakened her. She was just beginning to forget him a little, even to find compensation for the loss of him in that beautiful new affection that Felicity had lavished upon her during these past weeks. Now the sight of him—humbled, shamed, and cowardly as he had been—had swept away all such delusions. Whatever he was, she loved him. Worthless, dishonorable, perfidious, yet she loved him. A sob rose to her throat. Till now she had borne herself with a certain courage and fortitude, such as Felicity had shown in those bad moments of her life with Digby Trent. She possessed something strong and brave, the spirit of her forefathers nurtured under the grey skies and amid the stern, austere western hills. It was this quality that had come to her aid. Of spiritual assistance she had little or none. And her thoughts were resolutely concentrated upon the one desire—to effect her escape from a situation that had become

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too difficult for her. This urgent necessity kept her cool and composed and determined. She accomplished all the little details of her journey just as a practised traveler might have done. But all the time Guy's face was watching her, Guy's voice was urging upon her the absolute need of silence; he was placing himself in her hands. She could only help him by going away. When the train finally left the station Olave leaned back in her seat with a sob of relief. Cheldon Manor seemed to be stretching out wide grey peaceful arms to enfold her. She had come to desire and love its very peace, its safe monotony.

Miss Ardern was on her way back from the village where she had been visiting a sick child when she saw the lumbering outline of the station conveyance coming from the direction of Cheldon-on-the-Hill. The sight was not a very usual one unless guests were expected at the Manor when it was sometimes engaged to transport some of the luggage, and stimulated by a mild curiosity she paused in her walk until it came near enough for her to see its occupant. She caught a glimpse of something dark lying in a huddled position inside the cab.

Seeing her the driver pulled up. He knew Miss Ardern well.

"It be little Miss Trent, please, miss," he said, grabbing at his cap.

Miss Ardern opened the door of the ancient vehicle. She thought the man must have made a mistake.

"Why—Olave?" she exclaimed.

Olave raised herself and looked at her aunt with a strange expression in her eyes. There was something terrible in that young face ravaged for the first time by a dreadful grief. There were no tears

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in her eyes; they were hard and dry and stony. Her mouth was set in unchildlike lines.

So she had learned the truth. Learned it perhaps roughly, abruptly, with nothing to soften or mitigate it. Without another word Miss Ardern got into the cab, closed the door, and leaning out of the window bade the driver go on to the Manor.

Not a word was said on the way thither. Olave continued to look straight in front of her as if her eyes were fixed upon some dreadful vision of lost happiness. But Agnes Ardern took her hand in hers and held it in her warm comforting clasp. For, in spite of the heat of the day, the girl was shivering and her hands were deadly cold, like those of a person suffering from some sudden physical shock.

When they reached the house Miss Ardern did not ring the bell. She gave the man some money, and then opening the door led Olave into the hall and up the flight of polished oaken stairs. She took the girl to her room, removed her hat, and would have urged her to lie down had not Olave's strange self-control suddenly given way. In another moment she was in her arms, weeping frantically upon her breast. She shook from head to foot and between those sobs—uncontrollable now from sheer exhaustion—Miss Ardern heard these broken incoherent sentences.

"I have seen him—I have seen him. Oh, Aunt Aggie, did you know? He came—I was alone—and he told me he was Guy Quinn, that he was going to marry mother. Oh, Aunt Aggie, I want to die!"

"Poor Olave, poor Olave," said Miss Ardern tenderly.

Olave clung to her.

"Don't let me ever leave you again. I couldn't

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bear it. I can never go back. Why did I never think of it?"

Miss Ardern looked at her with calm tranquil eyes that yet held something of sorrow. Love of this passionate devastating kind had passed her by, and sometimes she had even experienced difficulty in believing in its existence. She had no personal knowledge of the suffering it could bring. But into her own unwounded heart there crept a very deep and sympathetic compassion for the victim in front of her. She felt as if she were watching a child enduring conscious agony beneath the surgeon's knife.

"Didn't *you* ever guess, Aunt Aggie?" she asked at last.

"I did more than guess—I knew. Your mother told me he had been staying at Cheldon Park while she and I were in Devonshire. There were many points on which the descriptions agreed. Both men were writers, both were Catholics. And, although I was not perfectly certain, I felt that there could be no reasonable doubt. You must not blame me, Olave, for keeping you in the dark. I tried over and over again to warn you. That day when I went to Cheltenham I had made up my mind that I must tell you on my return. When I got here there was no opportunity—you had already left."

She undressed her niece and put her to bed as if she had been a little sick child. Then she rang the bell and ordered some tea to be brought. She watched Olave as she drank it. The girl, comforted and in some measure tranquilized, lay back on the pillows and closed her eyes. She was so utterly spent and exhausted that she soon fell asleep.

She could not question her as yet, but Agnes longed to know how much of the truth had reached Felicity's ears. The little drama was unfolding rapidly. Olave and Guy Quinn were only too painfully aware

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of the truth. It could not be long therefore before Felicity would also learn it. And then what would happen?

From her knowledge of her sister, Agnes felt perfectly certain that she would put an end to her engagement. She would have to make definite choice between Guy and Olave. Agnes felt assured that in her present deeply maternal mood Felicity would prefer to relinquish anything rather than the custody of her child.

The mother might forgive his falseness and infidelity toward herself, but what mother could possibly forgive that deliberate perfidy toward her young daughter? And there was yet another question to be answered. Which of these two women did Guy Quinn really love? He would certainly have to convince a sceptical Felicity that his love was genuinely hers.

About six o'clock she received a telegram from Lady Trent, despatched from Paddington station, saying that she was on her way home and requesting that the motor might be sent to the Junction to meet her at a quarter past eight.

She must have started the moment she received Olave's telegram. In this resolute action of Felicity's Agnes read a determination to penetrate the mystery and to discover the truth for herself.

And it would fall to her lot to tell her.

CHAPTER XVII

LADY TRENT LEARNS THE TRUTH

FELICITY had an hour or two of grievous anxiety when Olave's disappearance was first discovered. It seemed to increase and accentuate the curious mystery that enfolded the happenings of that

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morning—the arrival of Guy, his departure after apparently a very brief interview with Olave, the girl's strange manner at luncheon, her almost hysterical request to be sent back to Cheldon, and now her flight from Waverton Street.

Hortense was the first to discover Olave's absence and came downstairs to inform her mistress of it. There was a rule that Olave should never go out alone, and Hortense had been deputed to accompany her whenever she needed an escort. Felicity was still asleep when her maid aroused her with this astonishing news. She sprang up, dressed herself hastily, and summoned the whole household to question them. But no one had seen Olave since luncheon and her exit had passed unnoticed. Felicity was almost beside herself with anxiety. She longed to communicate with Guy and to ascertain from him some explanation of the sudden change that had come over her daughter. But it was one of Guy's peculiarities that he would not have a telephone in his flat. He intensely disliked the thought that he was liable to be rung up at any moment and forced to disclose his presence in London, which, often for the sake of his work, he desired to keep a secret.

Felicity was not satisfied until she herself had searched the whole house for any trace of her missing daughter. She went into every room calling softly, "Olave! Olave!" always to be met by the same silence that presently got on her nerves and acquired a weird uncanny quality that deepened her anxiety. The only discovery she made was that Olave's dark blue coat and skirt and blue straw hat were missing. Her hand-bag containing her purse was also not to be found. Her flight had evidently been premeditated, and carried out with an extraordinary caution.

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Felicity was almost in despair when at about five o'clock Olave's telegram was handed to her. So the girl was safe—had returned to Cheldon. It did not take Lady Trent five minutes to make up her mind to follow her thither at once and learn the truth.

Before starting she wrote a little note to Guy which she told the servant must be sent by hand.

"I don't know what has happened," she wrote, "but Olave was very odd in her manner when I came home at luncheon-time expecting to find you here. I hope you did not tell her that you were opposed to the idea of her living with us. She was evidently very much upset and without saying a word to anyone she left the house and went back to Cheldon. I am following at once so we shall not meet for a few days. But I should be glad if you will come to see me on my return, which will certainly be in a day or two. There are one or two matters which you must really explain to me. When everything is going wrong in this way even the little fact of your continued absence from London, although you knew I was here, seems to acquire a deeper significance."

It would give him a hint of her displeasure. She was beginning to realize that Guy had consistently neglected her during the past few weeks. If he was still sulking at the thought of having Olave to live with them she would perhaps forego that plan for the present. She would give way—just at first. But she had hoped a great deal from their first meeting. She had felt convinced that Guy would like Olave, and would understand her own wish that she should form part of their new household. But everything had quite obviously gone awry and she was on her way to Cheldon now to learn, if she could, the meaning of it all.

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On reviewing the happenings of the past weeks Felicity was compelled to envisage the fact that, except at the very beginning, Guy had displayed no eagerness about their marriage. He had avoided her as much as possible ever since the day when she had disclosed her new plan about Olave. He had disagreed with her almost angrily; and there was no doubt that the interview had marked a turning-point in their mutual relations. Could it be that during the interim Guy had seen and fallen in love with another woman? Was he simply fastening upon this disagreement as a pretext for quarreling with her and compelling her to put an end to their engagement? Felicity found herself obliged to examine this contingency; it was one of her characteristics that she always preferred to envisage the truth, however disagreeable it might seem. She was not one of the weak souls who close their eyes and edge away from it. She would rather know it, even if it killed her. And once or twice she had tried to instill this doctrine into Olave. She had a natural wish that from the very outset Olave should be adequately equipped. It must be said that Felicity never dreamed she had come too late to be of help to her daughter in perhaps the most critical moment of her life.

Well, if Guy had changed his mind he must go. She would be very sorry, but it would not break her heart, which was surely hardened against the fiercest blows of a malicious fate. She had not been the wife of Digby Trent for nothing. As far as her heart was capable of being broken he had most certainly broken it. Guy could at the worst only inflict a severe wound. She would go abroad for a few months, supposing the marriage fell through, and would take Olave with her. But she did not really believe that anything would come in the way of their

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marriage. She felt convinced that Guy loved her, that all these mysteries were capable of some perfectly simple explanation. Perhaps he had spoken roughly and unkindly to Olave, had made her feel that she would be *de trop*. She felt that she could forgive him that unkindness, arising as it must necessarily have done from his wish to have an uninterrupted *tête à tête* with herself. And she could surely find a way of consoling Olave.

Agnes Ardern was sitting alone in the library when she heard the motor coming swiftly up the long avenue from the lodge. Outside the summer dusk had deepened into night and a young moon had risen and was sailing across a cloudless sky in which one or two stars hung like brilliant lamps.

Upstairs Olave was still asleep, and Miss Ardern hoped to prevent any interview from taking place that night between the mother and daughter. If Felicity questioned her she was quite prepared now to tell her the truth. It was necessary that she should know it—that she should be in no doubt as to the weak and dishonorable character of the man she had promised to marry. And although Agnes had never seen Guy Quinn and could, therefore, form no opinion of his exterior charm and fascination, she was very definitely convinced that the sooner Felicity broke off her engagement to him the better it would be for all concerned. Such a marriage could only have the effect of separating her completely from Olave. And how could she ever trust this man again? He had made love to her daughter, he had deliberately set about teaching Olave to love him—while still professing love for herself. If Olave had not been her own daughter the episode would never have been discovered. Were there other episodes of a similar nature in his past of which they knew so little.

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She was in the midst of these thoughts when the door opened and Lady Trent came into the room. Her manner as she greeted her sister was slightly cold and on the defensive. For in the absence of any precise information Felicity was still inclined to blame Agnes for Olave's sudden flight from Waverton Street. She believed that she resented the attachment between herself and Olave and was influencing the girl to return to Cheldon.

Lady Trent had an obstinate, imperious will, of the kind that is rendered still more obstinate by any opposition. She had resolved to obtain possession of Olave and to wean her from all old associations, and she believed that her sister was tacitly opposing her. Yet at first everything had seemed propitious; she had encountered no difficulty where Olave was concerned. The girl had shown a readiness to come to her, an eagerness in her love, that made her task quite an easy one. The few days they had spent together in London had been very happy ones for Felicity, and Olave had also appeared perfectly contented with her new lot. She had given her every proof of a warm affection even up till the very morning of her flight.

Lady Trent was angry with Olave, and she meant to show her that she was angry and that she could not submit to being treated in this way. But she was far more angry with Agnes who had, as she believed, tried to thwart her in her ardent endeavor to gain possession of her child.

"I came down at once," she said briefly. "I came to fetch Olave and I shall take her back to London to-morrow morning. I am extremely angry with her. Where is she?"

There was something peremptory in her manner and her dark eyes were aflame. Felicity looked beautiful in her anger, but there was something terrible,

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too, in her aspect before which Agnes Ardern shrank a little.

"I have put Olave to bed and she is asleep," she answered tranquilly. "I strongly advise you if you have anything to say to her, anything of an upsetting nature, to defer it till to-morrow."

"I shall do nothing of the kind!" said Lady Trent. "I am going up to her at once. If she is asleep I shall wake her."

She went out of the room.

Agnes resumed her old seat by the window. On a table near her burned a little electric lamp, and her work was lying there in close proximity. But now her hands were idle, she felt that she could not work. She was thinking of those two—face to face with each other upstairs. One determined to learn the truth and the other perhaps equally determined to conceal it. Only it was impossible to believe that even Felicity could force Olave to speak. The girl was suffering the pangs of a shame and humiliation that had flung her, as it were, into the very dust.

Half an hour later Felicity came downstairs.

"Is dinner ready, Aggie? We'd better go and have it at once."

Agnes glanced at her sister and could see by her perplexed face that she was still in the dark. She had, then, failed to exact any explanation from Olave. As Felicity came across the room she said irritably:

"I wish you wouldn't wear that shawl, Aggie, it looks so dreadfully old-maidish. Why don't you get yourself a proper evening wrap?"

"I put it on because I felt chilly," said Agnes, good-naturedly. Nevertheless she took off the offending shawl and laid it on a chair before she fol-

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lowed Lady Trent into the dining-room. They sat down opposite to each other at the square table.

Presently when they were alone Felicity said:

"Olave has refused to give me any explanation at all. I can't think what has come over her. She was so sweet and affectionate all the time we were in London together. I felt that I didn't deserve all the love and devotion she was giving me. But she has changed, Aggie, utterly changed since this morning. I don't know what has come over her. She was confused and embarrassed and looked really frightened when I went into her room just now. She would hardly speak to me. I was very angry with her but she certainly deserved it. You must have spoiled her dreadfully all these years."

"Don't you think that perhaps she had a good reason for acting as she did, Fay?" said Agnes.

"I knew, of course, that you would encourage her in her rebellion and take her part!" cried Lady Trent, angrily. "I think it very wrong of you to support her now, and against her own mother. You will, however, suffer for it in the end, for you will force me to remove her completely from your influence, until I have gained a permanent hold over her."

Lady Trent's face was set and hard; she spoke with a bitter determination. But Agnes continued to regard her with perfect calmness.

"I hope you will always do exactly as you choose about Olave," she said quietly; "she is your daughter, not mine. Only you must remember that she is not a child any longer."

"I suppose you are in her confidence?" Lady Trent burst forth angrily.

Did Agnes know? Had she the clue to all that seemed so bewildering, so mysterious?

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"I hope, indeed, I have won her confidence. She has lived with me all her life."

"Then will you please tell me?"

"Tell you what?"

"Why she has behaved so madly? Why she ran away from me like that without a word? Why she came back to you? Did you perhaps send for her?"

Agnes Ardern rose very slowly from her seat.

"Shall we go back into the library, Fay? If you really wish me to explain things to you perhaps the time has come."

Felicity stared at her sister in astonishment. She felt she was on the brink of some great and stupendous revelation. Although Agnes had spoken so calmly her words had been profoundly significant. They aroused a fresh anxiety in Lady Trent's heart. Her fierceness and anger dropped from her as if they had been quenched. She looked almost submissive as she followed her sister out of the room. They went into the library and Agnes shut the door.

"Fay," she said, "do you remember that when you first told Olave about your engagement to Mr. Quinn she made certain remarks that surprised you very much? You said that although she was so young she almost made you think that she had had an experience of some kind."

"Yes, I believe I did say something of the sort. But what has that to do with it, with her running away from me now?"

"It has a great deal to do with it," said Miss Ardern in a level tone, "and you will have to hear it now. I had hoped to keep you from the knowledge of it, but circumstances have made that impossible. Although Olave is so young, although I have tried my utmost to shelter her, to keep her from any premature knowledge of life and love, because your own disastrous marriage was always before my eyes

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and I was determined that she should not suffer as you did if I could possibly prevent it—in spite of all this Olave has had her first experience of love."

"Without your knowledge?" said Lady Trent.

That little misgiving in her heart grew and strengthened as she listened to Agnes. She was interested and attentive now; she forgot to be angry. But a strange formless anxiety assailed her. She felt for the first time that the elucidation of the mystery might aim a blow at her own heart, and that in some obscure way it would affect herself as well as Olave. She felt afraid. She had a moment of cowardice when she almost told Agnes that she would not listen, did not wish to hear. The moment passed.

"Quite without my knowledge," said Miss Ardern.

"Do you seriously mean that she's been carrying on a clandestine love-affair behind your back, Aggie? What was Mademoiselle doing? It ought not to have been possible!"

"I was away with you in Devonshire for a fortnight last summer. It happened then," said Agnes Ardern.

Her very flesh seemed to shrink from the task that lay before her. All her life she had dreaded that Felicity should be hurt. And now deliberately, with her own hands, she must inflict a wound that some instinct assured her would be lasting in its effects.

But Lady Trent was still quite unsuspecting. She was mentally reviewing the young men of the neighborhood. There were not many of them, and Agnes entertained so little that they had few opportunities of seeing Olave.

"Surely not one of the Mercer boys?" said Lady

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Trent. "Of course it would be very silly, but after all there would not be much harm."

"It was not one of the Mercer boys," said Agnes. "They treat Olave as if she were their sister. I have often thought that the way they 'rag' her, as they call it, was a little rough, but at least it was quite wholesome."

"Then who on earth could it have been?" said Lady Trent, knitting her dark delicate brows into a slight frown.

"It was a man whose name she did not know; a man whom she met day after day in Ardern's Knoll —oh, most innocently I am sure! But he did teach her to love him, he spoke words of passionate love to her, he gave her the first kisses of love she was ever to know."

Felicity was so pale now that Agnes almost felt alarmed. Was she beginning to guess?

"Who was he?" she exclaimed indignantly. "Didn't he know who Olave was? How dared he treat my daughter like a kitchen-maid?"

"He didn't know she was your daughter, Fay," said Miss Ardern dryly; "and I don't suppose for one moment that he meant any harm. I imagine he was amusing himself. Only he taught Olave to love him. When you asked her to go and live with you in London you will remember that at first she disliked the idea, and then jumped at it when you said she would be certain to meet authors and artists and other interesting people. This man was an author, and she had only the one thought in her head—the hope of meeting him again."

"He must have been a most appalling bounder to behave like that to a young girl. Still I should have hoped that Olave, who has been brought up so carefully, wouldn't give herself away like that. What made her go on meeting him?"

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"Olave is very young. And he quieted her scruples, he assured her that it was all right. He insisted upon her meeting him there. She often roamed about alone. I had only forbidden her to go outside our own grounds—even Mademoiselle was scarcely to blame."

"I hope you punished her severely?" said Lady Trent.

"I didn't punish her at all. She caught a chill staying out so late in the woods one very wet evening, and that was the beginning of her illness. I first began to suspect something from her admissions when she was delirious."

"And you never took any steps to try to trace the man?" said Lady Trent reproachfully. "He may have been very wicked; he must have been a scoundrel as well as a cad!" Her eyes flamed with anger.

"Afterward—I did—"

"And you found out his name?"

"Yes, Fay," said Miss Ardern reluctantly.

"Who told you?" demanded Felicity.

"I learned it first from you," said Agnes. "I had intended, however, to ask Lady Mercer the name of her guest."

She stopped and looked wildly at Felicity as if imploring her not to ask any further questions.

Lady Trent had the feeling that she had approached unawares a tremendous and dark abyss. The suspicions that had at first seemed so absurd and improbable became more definite and pronounced. Then the words leaped to her lips; she could no longer repress them. Turning to Agnes she said fiercely:

"Do you mean to tell me that the man was Guy?"

The air seemed suddenly full of those overwhelming words; the very silence re-echoed them. Agnes

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Ardern's fingers twitched nervously. She did not look up; she felt that she could not meet her sister's angry accusing eyes. After a long pause she said:

"He told her that he was staying with Lady Mercer. For some reason or other they agreed not to tell each other their names. But you said once that it was strange he should have been there when we were away."

"But even so, how do you know it was Guy?"

"An author, a Catholic—so much she knew about him. Was it likely there could be two of them? But to-day has killed any remaining doubt in my mind; Olave met him again in your house, and he told her who he was."

Felicity burst forth angrily.

"You should have told me! Why were you so silent, so criminally silent? We might have spared Olave this shock of seeing him again? I had a right to know, to decide what was best to be done. You cannot mean that you were going to leave me purposely in the dark?"

"I did not tell you, Fay, because you were Mr. Quinn's promised wife," said Agnes, looking at her sister with a very tender and beautiful compassion in her grey eyes.

"All the more reason why it was absolutely necessary that I should know! Is this why you were against my having Olave with me? Do you suppose Guy had guessed something and that was why he urged me not to have her? Why have you all combined in this conspiracy of silence to prevent me from knowing the truth?"

"I did not wish to tell you, Fay. I did not want to come between you and your promise of happiness. But my intention was to tell Olave. I should

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have told her that very day I went to Cheltenham, but when I came back you had already gone."

"Do you mean she is in love with him still?"

"I am certain that she loves him very much."

"He was playing with her—he thought of her as a pretty child! He cannot have been in the least serious!" All the time she was speaking Felicity was conscious of a little black doubt that crept into her heart and would not be denied. Did he love her—or Olave—or indeed anyone except himself? He was a coward as well as a dishonorable man. He had not even had the courage to remain and acknowledge the truth. He had left the difficult situation to Olave, to deal with as best she might.

The angry light faded from her eyes, leaving them dull and somber. She looked as if she had received a mortal blow. For the second time in her life she had a vision of happiness lying shattered at her feet.

"I must be alone—I must be alone—" Lady Trent muttered as she groped her way, slowly and painfully, toward the door.

Agnes heard her go upstairs with a slow, lagging footstep. She did not pause outside Olave's door but went straight to her own room.

CHAPTER XVIII

A MOMENTOUS DECISION

LADY TRENT did not appear again that night. She remained in her own room and refused admittance to everyone, even her maid. But she did not go to bed until long after midnight. She sat by the window letting the cool pure night air blow

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caressingly upon her face, while she reviewed the situation in which she found herself.

There was something dreadful about the calmness that had succeeded her brief flash of anger. She began to see that Agnes had behaved exactly as ninety-nine people out of a hundred do generally behave when they find themselves confronted by a hideous dilemma, that is to say, she had vascillated from day to day and had ended by doing nothing at all. She had let things run their normal course until it was too late, and Lady Trent saw that it would be foolish to blame her.

Nor did she find it in her heart to attach much blame to Olave. She knew exactly how fascinating Guy could be when he wished to charm and to please. She was aware that a very young, very inexperienced girl would find it difficult to resist Guy Quinn when he was bent upon conquest. She, a woman of the world, no longer young and with a bitter past experience of marriage, had fallen in love swiftly with him, had consented within a few weeks of their first meeting to an engagement. Her own resistance, despite the obstacles that he had been careful to set in front of her, had been weak and inadequate. And Olave was a young ignorant girl without any experience of life; she knew even less than most girls of her age, for she had never been to school, and had been very strictly brought up and most carefully sheltered. Small wonder then that she had lent herself eagerly to the adventure with its thrilling touch of romance so assiduously fostered by Guy, its clandestine love-making, its secret kisses. He must have used exactly those soft endearing ways with which he had first wooed Felicity herself. She could clearly envisage all that had passed between them, with an accuracy that was heart-breaking. She did not believe, however, that he loved

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Olave. That faithless philandering had nothing to do with love. But it had shown Guy to her in his true colors. He was not a man you could trust. He had not the scrupulous sense of honor such as is commonly associated with a well-bred Englishman. Yet she was too frank with herself not to admit even now that from the first he had utterly fascinated her. He was a delightful companion. She had liked something that was young, fresh, and wholly modern in his outlook. She had admired his talent, had felt interested in his work, his ambition. But it was all at an end. She would never marry him now. She would see him once more, and then good-by forever.

She told herself that only her love for Olave made it possible for her to renounce Guy in this cold-blooded way. To marry him had become an impossibility because of Olave. Perhaps if there had been no Olave she might have turned a deaf ear to those counsels of prudence that urged her to give up a man who had proved so weak and faithless and unstable. But to marry him now that she was in possession of this knowledge would mean that she would have forever to renounce her claim upon Olave, and that was a thing which she was unable to do. Her love for Olave had during the past few eventful weeks taken a place that was out of all proportion to other affections in her life. Beside it her old feeling for Agnes and her new feeling for Guy alike grew pale and shadowy. She would have given up her own freedom and independence to Guy even while she was aware of his true character, but she was not going to surrender for his sake this other and deeper claim. For a little while she did carefully weigh those rival claims, and she saw that she could not give up Guy without considerable pain and suffering. She had loved him perhaps more than she had ever intended to love anyone again. She

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had thought that life with him would be as nearly perfect as it was possible for human life to be. Now he had willfully shattered all that fair and desirable prospect. She even regarded his love for her with something of incredulity. She believed that it had undergone some mysterious and perhaps sinister change. She could date this change from the time of her visit to Devonshire, and she attributed it to his meeting with Olave.

And Olave! When she thought of Olave it almost seemed to her that her love for Quinn changed into violent hatred. She assured herself that when she saw him for that last time she would tell him certain truths. He would have to acknowledge the accuracy of that portrait of himself which she was determined to present to him. She did not mean to spare him. The thought of Olave would give her courage and eloquence. And he should be told quite clearly that he must never, never see Olave again. The girl was so young, she would surely soon forget him. And even if she could not forget easily she must learn to endure the pain of that enforced separation. It would be part of the necessary punishment which she certainly deserved.

Lady Trent knew how deep can be the impression made upon a young girl's mind by the first words of love. That was why so many girls married the first man who offered them marriage and from whom they first heard the language of love. It was possible that Olave would not easily forget. Lady Trent was aware of the kind of impression that Guy could make—had she not indeed, alas, had personal experience of it?—and she saw that it would not be quickly effaced. It was no difficult matter for her to put her self in Olave's place, and to realize all that she had suffered and all that she would still have to suffer of pain and frustration. But time and sepa-

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ration are powerful agents, and she was resolved to leave nothing to chance. She would guard Olave as even Agnes had never guarded her. She would make it impossible for her ever to see Guy again. And in course of time the girl would come out and be presented, and perhaps with her beauty she would make a brilliant and happy marriage.

What had been his real attitude toward Olave? Lady Trent wondered if he would offer any explanation on this point. Had it been only an idle episode—one of many perhaps, half-play, half earnest? Had the girl been any other but her own daughter Lady Trent would not perhaps have had much difficulty in forgiving him. But that it should have been her own sheltered innocent little girl touched her pride to the quick, and inflicted a wound on those delicate maternal feelings that were yet deep and strong and fiercely protective. She, too, felt humiliated by every one of those light kisses that had been bestowed upon Olave. She, too, felt cheapened by the loss of dignity that Olave had sustained. These thoughts crystallized her determination to break with Guy Quinn forever. By breaking off her engagement she would both punish him and avenge Olave.

Some instinct of delicacy prevented Felicity from seeing Olave again before she left Cheldon on the following morning. She had made up her mind to return to London for perhaps a couple of days to accomplish the task she had set herself to do. So she left purposely by an early train, leaving a message for Olave that she did not like to disturb her at such an early hour.

Felicity breakfasted in her own room and had rather hoped to avoid a meeting with Agnes also. But when she went downstairs, dressed for her journey, she found her sister already in the hall. Agnes

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Ardern's tranquil face bore little outward sign of those disturbing events which were affecting so vitally two inmates of the household. With her, indeed, self-control and a prudent concealment of emotion had become a habit. This trait is more commonly observable in the mothers of families than in unmarried women. It forms part of the wise unselfish maternal instinct to keep disagreeable happenings from the knowledge of the young. But Agnes Ardern had twice known something of a vicarious motherhood. She had taken the place of a mother to two girls of successive generations. While it had robbed her of some of the irresponsible joys of youth and inflicted premature age upon her, it had not been without its beneficent effects upon her own character. It had given her wisdom, much knowledge of the human heart, a broad and deep sympathy with youth. It had made her at the same time wise and kind, understanding and indulgent. There was something so maternal about her that she naturally attracted all young and helpless creatures to her side. She had known something of the joys of motherhood without its physical pangs.

Felicity went up to her and kissed her. The kiss was very welcome to Agnes, for it showed her that her sister both gave and asked pardon for all that had passed between them. It was a sign too of practical reconciliation. It was impossible for Lady Trent to be long at variance with Agnes; the ties between them were too close and strong. But this morning without saying a word to each other they knew that they possessed unanimity of intention and purpose. Agnes did not ask her sister what steps she was going to take; she read the truth in Felicity's small set face that was paler than usual. But it hurt her to see that look in Felicity's eyes. It was an expression of extinguished happiness such as she

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had seen in them once before when Lady Trent returned to Cheldon for the first time after becoming the wife of Sir Digby. She had then had that same almost stupefied look as if she had endured a sudden unexpected wound inflicted by a hand that had always seemed friendly. Would this second disillusionment of Felicity Trent cut as deep as the first one?

At the station Lady Trent telegraphed to Guy Quinn to come to see her at tea-time. Her sudden comings and goings never caused the slightest comment or disturbance among her household at Waverton Street; they were far too much accustomed to her slightly capricious visits that might prove either long or short. She was a restless being and often made plans for departure at very short notice. Luncheon was ready for her when she arrived, and after making a hasty pretence at a meal she went up to her room. Now that the interview was approaching she felt almost afraid to face it. There was always something disagreeable about breaking off one's engagement at the eleventh hour, especially when the wedding-day was practically fixed and quantities of presents had been received and acknowledged. At first she had not considered these details, but now they assumed grave proportions, and made everything seem more difficult and complicated than ever. She expected that Quinn would give her a certain amount of trouble.

"I must be a very hard woman," she thought to herself, "for I don't feel in the least sorry for Guy."

She felt completely changed from the woman who, such a short time ago, had accepted his devotion with so much pride and real happiness. She had been happy as a girl in the soft atmosphere of his love. Her heart had beat quickly at his approach just as if she had indeed been a young girl. Now

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her pulses seemed slow and lagging and weak. She only wanted to see him that she might break as quickly and quietly as possible the fragile bond between them.

CHAPTER XIX

GUY'S LOST IDEALS

WHEN Guy Quinn came into the drawing-room at Waverton Street that afternoon he found Felicity sitting there alone, evidently waiting for him. Her appearance gave him something in the nature of a shock, and he thought he had never seen her look so nearly plain before. Her dress, he decided, was unbecoming. It was all black except for a narrow rim of white round the opening at the throat, and black did not suit her. Its sharp hard lines seemed to conceal the supple grace of her slender figure. A sleepless night, an early start, the journey in the hot train, had washed every atom of color out of her face and painted dark rings under her eyes. There was a look not so much of age but of lost youth which he had never noticed in her before. In a few years she would be middle-aged. As he regarded her with a sort of nervous shyness suggestive of guilt he became aware that she had in some way obtained full knowledge of all that had passed.

Had it been a question of any other girl he would have shifted the blame—if you could apply the word to an episode so idle and so innocent—upon the woman, in accordance with the most ancient of transgressors. But that course was clearly impossible. He knew enough of feminine and especially of ma-

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ternal psychology to realize that that would be an unforgivable error of judgment. It was, of course, the worst of fates, he now bitterly reflected, that his careless philandering should have found a partner in Lady Trent's daughter, thus thrusting the culpability wholly upon his own shoulders.

Felicity's cold searching look, straight, penetrating, and unsoftened by the slightest tenderness, warned him that he had now to meet the disagreeable moment of explanation. Some people can always face the consequences of their own folly, regarding them as the inevitable payment for a past pleasure. But Guy was not one of those braver souls. He could not drink the after-cup with philosophy and tell himself it was worth while. To be called upon to pay always seemed to him an injustice, especially when, as in this case, he had never intended the slightest harm.

He had come resolved if need be to treat the whole thing in light ironical fashion, and he had hoped that Felicity with her ready intelligence would not be too hard upon him. It had not occurred to him that at the eleventh hour, with the wedding-day actually fixed, she would have the hardihood to break off her engagement to him. Now for the first time this possibility presented itself to him, and he was astonished to find himself so indifferent to the prospect of such a calamity. He only passionately desired to get the necessary interview over as quickly as possible. Then he could go away.

"Will you sit down, Guy? I have something to say to you."

Guy sat down, disliking the peremptory tone in her voice but offering no remonstrance.

"I know what happened in the summer between you and Olave," she said abruptly; "my sister told me. She ought, of course, to have told me before,

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but under the circumstances one can hardly blame her."

Her voice was hard and emotionless. Guy turned from white to crimson. How senseless and shameful and above all how ineffably foolish that past conduct of his seemed to him now.

Hiding his resentment he said, with an attempt at carelessness:

"My dear Felicity, you are not, I hope, going to make a fuss about that? I admit it was very foolish, but it was a mere idle passing of the time."

Felicity hardened her heart against him. The man had power to fascinate her still, and she knew that her love for him could not die in a single day. Short as it had been it had struck roots in her heart. He could still revive that emotion. Only yesterday that love had seemed to promise a secure changeless happiness for the future. It was terrible to think that already that harvest was destroyed, as one night's storm can utterly ruin the fruits of a fair vineyard.

She watched Guy attentively and a little curiously. Before they were engaged everything had been always smooth and harmonious between them. They had been able to talk easily and in a sense intimately to each other, sure of mutual sympathy and understanding. But since their engagement they had only had one meeting and it had not proved a particularly harmonious one for either of them. They had spent the time, for the most part, in discussing Olave's future, and their views on the subject had been as the poles apart. She could understand now why he had been so fiercely opposed to the scheme of having Olave to live with them. He had been suspicious even then of the identity of that unknown girl at Cheldon. He had tried to defer as long as possible the evil hour of verifying and substantiating his fears. Perhaps he had even had some hope

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of delaying it until after their marriage had taken place.

"It may have been an idle passing of the time for you. But you taught my daughter to love you, to believe that you loved her."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"She's such a baby—I really didn't quite realize how young she was. She looks more than her age. And I should have imagined you would have brought up your daughter differently—with at least some knowledge of the world!"

"Should you?" Her tone was dry. "As it happens I left all that to my sister, whose plan of education was to keep Olave from any knowledge of life for as long as possible. I am not saying it was a wise plan or one suited to the twentieth century. But she wished to save her from the kind of unhappiness I had to endure." She looked at Guy and then for the first time spoke to him of the past. "I left my husband before I was eighteen. Olave was born a few months later at Cheldon but he never saw her. He taught me to love him exactly as you taught Olave the same amiable lesson, by meeting me secretly in Ardern's Knoll."

An involuntary shiver passed through Guy's frame in spite of the burning heat of the August day. He remembered that Judy had told him the villagers considered the place unlucky. He had himself, when there, felt almost as if it were inhabited by unseen presences such as are sometimes said to haunt the scenes of obscure and secret crimes. He remembered, too, the fierce storm that had smitten the little wood on the last day when Olave had come to him there; he recalled her nervous terror, her clinging to him; he could almost feel her head resting upon his shoulder.

"But you," she continued coldly, "had not the

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same excuse that Digby had. He wished to marry me. You were practically engaged to another woman. You have proved yourself to be utterly dishonorable."

Guy did not speak. His eyes were fixed upon the floor. The indictment was perfectly just, perfectly accurate. The deadly force of Felicity's words held him spell-bound. He wondered idly if she had been equally hard upon Olave.

"You must surely have seen that Olave was an utterly ignorant child?"

"Yes, I saw that," he admitted.

He seemed to see her then, pushing aside the green boughs and coming toward him, a light-footed vision of Spring incarnate.

Then almost involuntarily he looked at Felicity. She seemed to have grown suddenly older.

"Either you were false to me or you were playing contemptibly with Olave," she continued. "I can hardly believe you were serious in saying that you loved her. But in any case you shall never see either of us again. I have absolutely made up my mind about that. As far as Cheldon is concerned, you shall never set foot in it. And I strongly advise you to marry a woman of your own faith; a woman who will be able to help you as I could never have done."

He hardly heard her. He was not thinking of Felicity then—she was miles away in another world that did not matter at all. But he was thinking of Olave—his beautiful little Primavera, from whose young and sweet presence he was to be forever banished. In the sudden revulsion of feeling he came near to hating Felicity, so passionately did he resent the terms of his punishment. What right had she to step in thus and deliberately ruin his whole life?

He loved Olave. He knew that since seeing her

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he had ceased altogether to love Felicity. But Lady Trent had power to banish him. She would prevent them from ever seeing each other again. He guessed how useless it would be to try to circumvent the vigilance of Felicity.

"You can never have cared for me at all," he broke out angrily.

"You know that is not true. But I care for Olave much more."

"Do you suppose she will always submit to being ruled by you?"

"I intend that for the present she shall. I mean to save her from people like you, from making a fatal mistake in early youth."

"You won't find it as easy as you suppose!"

She stopped him with a swift gesture of anger.

"Are you telling me that you seriously love my daughter?"

He was silent then; every motive of prudence urged him not to answer, lest he should betray the truth.

"For if so let me tell you that quite apart from this I should never permit her to marry you. I should never allow Olave to marry a Roman Catholic and let Cheldon pass into Catholic hands. It would be quite against all the traditions of our family."

Guy rose. Standing there he looked more worn than when she had last seen him. His face was ashen pale. He had not answered her question in so many words, but when she looked at his face now she felt that she could read the truth. His eyes were dull. He had expected punishment at her hands but not such drastic retribution as this. It seemed altogether out of proportion to what he perhaps justly merited. He had the feeling that his very heart had been struck.

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"I have never known any Roman Catholics at all intimately," she continued. "But I must tell you frankly that you have not made me think any better of them or of their religion. That is why I intend that Olave shall have nothing to do with it. If you have taught her to wish to know more of your religion, Guy, let me tell you it will be useless. There are things I shall never allow."

"Do not be hard on her," he said suddenly; "you must put the whole blame on me. I—I encouraged her to come. She had scruples but I overruled them. Please do not be hard on her."

"I am never hard on her. We are the best of friends," said Lady Trent with a touch of scorn. "But it is a mother's right to settle certain things."

"If she is unhappy, religion—the Catholic religion—would comfort her," he said, scarcely knowing why he was speaking in this way to Felicity. "It *can* be a comfort, you know. You must not judge of Catholics by me. I told you that I was not a good one, and it is because I have not been faithful that I have done things—many things—for which I am sorry now."

Nothing that she had said throughout the bitter little interview had stung him so sharply as her references to his faith had done. All his dormant loyalty, his sense that in this respect he had been for years abundantly lacking, rose up now like stern accusers. Words floated back to his mind, long-forgotten, long-unheeded, but with full power to scourge him. *"Against Thee only have I sinned."* He was back among those ancient influences that had once gone to the making of him. A little carelessness, a little indolence, a little rebellion, trifles that at first had seemed scarcely to amount to any real lack of fidelity, had gradually brought him to the pass of actual faithlessness. He deserved all

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her hard words; he deserved never to see Olave again, but most of all he deserved this final bitterness of having his religion judged by his own want of correspondence to its sacred demands. He felt sunk in an intolerable abyss of shame whose bitter waters threatened to overwhelm him.

"I love your daughter," he said at last, as if the truth were being dragged from him. "I know I am not worthy of her now. But some day I will try to prove to you that I am worthy."

"I am afraid that task will be beyond you," she answered.

She had dreaded to hear him say it. She would rather have parted from him still believing that he had not cared for either herself or Olave. But now she realized that the struggle was not over. If their love for each other survived, triumphing over the separation and silence she was determined to impose upon them, her task of ultimately keeping Guy and Olave apart would be a long and strenuous one.

Olave's love would have helped him, would have taught him to seek again long-lost ideals. She remembered what Olave had said about the desirability of people who loved each other being of the same religion.

"I am going to say good-by to you now. I am leaving London to-morrow. It is unlikely that we shall ever meet again. I intend for the future to live much more at Cheldon." Felicity's tone was cold and rather remorseless.

Guy took her hand for a moment and then dropped it. His eyes were very bright, almost as if with unshed tears.

"If it would ever comfort or help her to know that I love her I hope you will tell her. I should

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like her at least to know that where she is concerned I have never been anything but faithful."

Amid the confusion and stress of the moment Guy heard her move across the room. She rang the bell. He went almost blindly toward the door.

When he had gone Felicity sank back in her chair, unnerved and exhausted by the protracted ordeal.

"She shall never know—she shall never know," she said to herself aloud.

CHAPTER XX

A BROKEN ENGAGEMENT

WHEN her interview with Guy was over and he had left the house Felicity indulged in a few tears. They were not altogether tears of anger, there was something also of suffering and grief in them. For the moment she felt as if the whole brightness of her life was under an eclipse. She had destroyed with her own hands and of her own will that future which, until lately, had promised such fair and beautiful things. She had looked forward eagerly to a fuller existence and one that held more purpose and serious endeavor than her old wandering aimless life. She was tired of being perpetually alone, of traveling about in search of distraction and climate. She was to have had both Guy and Olave, and she had liked the idea of being necessary to them both. Her wedding-day had been approaching on winged feet, and there had even been moments when Guy had made her feel like a young girl enjoying her first experience of love's witchery. Yet most of all she had looked forward to the time when she and Guy and Olave would all be happily

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settled in Waverton Street, a very complete little family party.

During the weeks of her engagement she had often assured herself that she was heartily sick of her freedom and solitude—those two things which had at first seemed to her so precious. She had longed to slip fetters on her hands and feet, to yield to the will of another, to consult the wishes and pleasures of others. She wanted to bind herself down to the kind of settled ordered existence in which so many women find a complete and satisfying happiness. Now these plans could never materialize. That brief tempestuous interview had sealed their destruction. Even if she had loved Guy well enough to overlook and forgive his fault and marry him notwithstanding all that had passed, she could never have had Olave with her. It would have been necessary to relegate Olave to the permanent care of Miss Ardern. The pretty picture of their home life, brightened by the presence of her young daughter, would in any case have been utterly erased. One glimpse of Guy had sufficed to drive Olave forth out of the house like a wild hurt thing maddened by a sudden wound. She had suffered, was still suffering, and the pain had driven her back to the assured and familiar shelter of Agnes Ardern's loving arms.

But as she sat there alone, Felicity realized that Guy had never truly loved her. It had been with him a passing thing, forgotten perhaps from the first moment when he saw Olave in Ardern's Knoll. He must have desired at all costs to end their engagement. He had not loved her, and he had confessed in unmistakable terms his love for her daughter. Where she had power to make him suffer for his perfidy was in her decree that he should never see Olave again. He had gone away acknowledging his own unworthiness, yet assuring her that

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one day he would be worthy. This declaration had filled Felicity with alarm. He should never marry Olave. The question of religion, apart from everything else, was too serious a thing. She was going to throw all her force, all her power, into the balance to keep Olave from him. She was going to do for Olave what her father and Agnes had failed to do for herself.

But her own task of winning Olave—winning her so surely that she would never wish to defy nor thwart her even in this question of marriage — would have to be begun all over again. There would be fresh barriers to over-pass, barriers more formidable than anything she had hitherto had to surmount. It was possible that Olave would not easily forgive her for being the woman whom Guy had loved, whom he had wished to marry. It might take her a long time to win over again her child's love, her trust and confidence.

The whole affair was so unusual, so difficult, and so tragically complicated, that Lady Trent shrank from returning to Cheldon and from beginning that new effort to conquer Olave. Yet during the two days she spent in Waverton Street, undoing the plans she had made, arresting the lawyers in their work and returning the presents she had received, her brain was busy preparing for the future. Her plans now centered wholly round Olave. For her sake she would spend the autumn and winter at Cheldon. There was to be no shirking on her part.

By the time her mother returned to the Manor Olave had recovered from the first violence of her emotion, and had resumed at Miss Ardern's earnest request her normal daily life. Mademoiselle had returned some weeks earlier than usual, but for the present lessons were somewhat in abeyance and she was more of a companion than a governess, accom-

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panying Olave in her long walks and drives, and keeping her, as much as possible, in the open air.

The long drought had ceased suddenly and the weather was very wet on the day of Felicity's return. There was a strong westerly wind blowing in tempestuously from the Atlantic and bringing with it heavy rain. The hills opposite were almost blotted out and Ardern's Knoll was only dimly visible and looked like a group of spectral trees, indeterminate and formless.

Lady Trent could not help observing the change that had come over Olave since the day she had fled from Waverton Street. She was very silent and scarcely ever smiled. She shrank from her mother and seemed incapable of looking her in the face.

Felicity did not immediately tell Agnes that she had broken off her engagement. She felt some hesitation about speaking of it. The first day at Cheldon passed without her making any allusion to it. Then she made up her mind to tell Olave. It was difficult to find an opportunity for doing this because Olave seemed to avoid her purposely, and they seldom found themselves alone together. It was as if Agnes were tacitly aiding and abetting Olave in this deliberate avoidance of such an intimate interview as Felicity desired to have with her daughter. The thought annoyed her, and she determined that before night she would see Olave and tell her what had happened, and give her a certain insight into her own plans for the future.

She would have to tell them both that for the present she had resolved to live entirely at Cheldon.

After tea that evening when the rain was beating down upon the garden Agnes rose to leave the room. Olave sprang up as if intending to accompany her, but Lady Trent called her back with the note of

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authority in her voice that could always enforce obedience.

"Olave, please come here. I wish to speak to you."

She had hardly said two words to Olave alone since the girl had fled from Waverton Street. Although Felicity had been very angry and had blamed her at the time, she was not going to allude to it now. Olave had had ample and sufficient reasons for an action that had at first seemed one of heedless rebellion.

The girl flushed and looked almost frightened. But she recognized the peremptory ring in Felicity's voice and she came back rather reluctantly and stood in front of her.

"Yes, mother?"

"Sit down please, Olave."

Olave sat down and waited for her mother to speak.

So far Lady Trent had avoided mentioning Quinn's name to Olave. But she knew that when two people have to live together it is a mistake to have a subject that must always be avoided and never mentioned. Even if it be a painful one, it is better to face the pain than to create an atmosphere of mystery and intrigue such as must inevitably surround a forbidden topic. Felicity therefore intended to be perfectly frank with her daughter and afterward to be equally frank with Agnes. She hoped to win a corresponding frankness from Olave.

"Olave," she said, "I don't know whether you guessed the object of my visit to London, but now I wish to tell it to you. I am not going to be married, I have broken off my engagement to Mr. Quinn. I think you will understand why without my telling you."

For a moment Olave was silent as if pondering

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over the precise significance of these words. A dull flush darkened her face. She pressed her hands together nervously, but she did not look at her mother.

"I felt under the circumstances it was the only thing to do."

It had hurt Felicity to say the words, and she felt as if she had been stabbing her own heart with a sharp weapon. The sense of loss was rather keenly present to her just then, and her anger against Guy had considerably diminished. To state the case in plain words had involved also a determined subdual of pride. It was not easy for her to acknowledge that she had made a mistake.

"Do you mean because of me?" said Olave at last.

"Yes, it was chiefly on your account. But it was also because I had learned that I could not trust and honor Guy as a woman ought to be able to trust and honor the man she is going to marry."

Olave lifted her dark eyes to her mother's face with an expression of uncomprehending surprise.

"Didn't you love him then, after all?" she asked, in a dull bewildered tone.

Why had she asked this question? It was a cruel little question, difficult and hard to answer.

"Yes, I loved him," she answered at last. "But this—this has killed my love for him, Olave."

The girl continued to look at her mother with that curious expression of non-comprehension.

"He must be very unhappy, very broken-hearted," she said presently, in a slow contemplative tone.

To love—and not to be loved in return—that was the only sorrow she could understand just now. But it was a sorrow that could darken all the world and render life completely purposeless, as she well knew. She had loved Guy, and he had never loved her.

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Instead he had loved her mother who did not now love him at all. It was the desolation, the confusion, of these thoughts that held Olave silent and wondering. Why was life like that—such a terrible thing—so long, so bewildering?

But she shrank a little further away from Felicity as if her very nearness, the soft alluring tones of her voice, had become hateful to her. Yes, her mother had possessed this great and wonderful gift of Guy Quinn's love, and she had valued it so little that she was able to cast it aside relentlessly at the first sign of fault and failure on his part. She was able to speak of it so quietly, as if it hardly hurt her at all. How could she have done this thing for Olave's —for anyone's—sake?

Olave felt as if she had seen another woman pick up her most cherished possession and then fling it carelessly into the dust, as if it had been of no worth at all.

Oh, why had Guy loved her mother? Why had he never loved her? She would have loved him faithfully and forever, in spite of all the world. If he had asked her to do such a thing she would have joyfully followed him barefoot across the world! These considerations were altogether too much for her self-control. She gave a low wild sob.

Lady Trent looked up sharply at the sound.

"Why, what's the matter, Olave? Why are you crying?"

But Olave was past all reticence.

"Oh, how could you be so cruel? When he loved you so. How could you give him up?" Her dark eyes were fixed passionately upon Felicity's pale little face. "You had his love, the most precious thing in all the world! You never valued it at all! What can it matter about trusting and honoring people if you love them?"

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For a moment Lady Trent was far too much astonished to speak. She looked in bewilderment at the angry reproachful eyes that were gazing at her with such wrath and scorn.

"Hush, Olave," she said in a tone of quiet authority. "I can't have you speaking like that. You are talking so wildly—what do you know of these things?"

"I know because I love him!" There was something almost terrible in the emphasis with which she uttered these words. But there was pride in her tone, and in the way she flung back her head, as if she gloried in that love. "And if he had only loved me, do you suppose I should have given him up if you—if all the world—had prayed me on your knees to do so? Do you think I should have said anything about honoring and trusting? Love makes up for—for everything!"

Even Felicity flinched a little before this speech, before that young stern condemning glance. Olave, young and ignorant as she was, realized something of the insult offered to the majesty of love.

The words of a poem drifted back inconsequently to Felicity's mind:

> But Love is a god, and I wonder how
> You will make your peace with him!

"If he had wanted to marry me I shouldn't have cared for anything except to become his wife—to be with him always—always!"

She spoke with a passionate vehemence that increased as she proceeded. The words fell from her lips with a curious rapidity as if she had lost all control over herself. Felicity could indeed scarcely realize that it was Olave, her own child, who was speaking to her in this fashion. What could she say to her? What answer could she make? She

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could not tell her the one thing that in all the world could comfort her, namely that Guy did indeed love her. It would be the worst of folly to inform her of this fact And it was utterly useless to remind her of Guy's faithlessness, his perfidy, his unworthiness. Had she not said just now that nothing mattered when one loved?

She became aware that Olave had resumed her indignant discourse.

"And you—just for a little thing like that—you have thrown him over and made him miserable. Oh, you could never have loved him at all!"

She looked at her mother now with curiosity as well as with anger. How could she treat this priceless gift with such light disdain?

Felicity was beginning to feel exhausted. She had endured a good deal of late, and what she had done had been done more for Olave's sake than from any other motive. Now she began to realize the formidable barrier that had arisen between herself and her daughter. She realized also the immense complications that threatened to darken the future. It was evident that Olave blamed her bitterly for what she had done. She was suffering from the hurt to Guy. It was Felicity who, in her daughter's eyes, had been inconstant and perfidious.

Lady Trent rose.

"You are very unreasonable," she said in a cool, cutting tone, "and I am not going to discuss the matter any further with you. I do not like the way you have spoken to me. But there is one thing I must tell you. When I sent Guy away I told him that he should never see either of us again. You must understand that quite clearly, Olave. I forbid you to make any attempt to see him or to write to him."

"He will never want to see us," said Olave heav-

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ily. "Do you think he could ever trust one of us again?"

"You have said quite enough," said Felicity, with a touch of anger. "The sooner you set to work to forget him the better. And I simply can't have you behaving like this, speaking in this way to me."

Her tone of authority brought Olave suddenly to her senses. She was aware that she had been addressing her mother as if she had been another girl and her equal. She secretly admitted that Lady Trent had been both patient and forbearing. She went slowly out of the room, and Felicity watched her slight, willowy, rather drooping form with attention. Yes, Olave was a child no more. That unhappy love had come convulsively, tumultuously, into her life, rudely awakening her, ripening her to a sudden precocious maturity.

In the passage near her own room Olave encountered Agnes Ardern.

"Come into my room for a minute, Aunt Aggie, dear," she whispered.

"Yes, dear Olave."

When Olave found herself alone in her room with Miss Ardern she no longer repressed those scalding, blistering tears that were in her eyes, almost blinding her.

"Aunt Aggie, she's given him up. She isn't going to marry him. All because of me. She says we shall neither of us ever see him again."

Miss Ardern looked at her with grave eyes.

"She has done the only thing that was possible, Olave. When you are older you will understand."

"I hope she will go away soon. I felt wicked—almost as if I hated her—when she was telling me about it."

"Hush, Olave dear. Never have such thoughts as those."

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"He loved her. If it hadn't been for her he might have learned to love me. Now she says I am never to see him again."

She flung herself upon the sofa and wept aloud. Her whole body shook and shivered with that fierce sobbing, almost as if a storm were passing over it. Miss Ardern stood there motionless, watching her, pitying her. She was so young to experience this passion of grief.

"I can't have this, Olave," she said at last. "You must really learn to control yourself or you will be ill again."

She began to feel helpless. Olave did not attempt to get up; the sobs grew louder. Miss Ardern did not quite know how to act. She had the feeling that she could not use her old authority, that Felicity disliked it when she did so. In former days she would have dealt with a similar situation with a more fearless initiative.

"If you don't stop I shall have to call your mother," she said at last.

There was, however, no need for her to resort to this step, for Felicity passing down the hall at that moment was arrested by the sound of that wild emotion. She opened the door of Olave's room and advanced toward her. The eyes of the two sisters met. Agnes Ardern shook her head with a slight gesture of despair. Then she withdrew leaving the mother and daughter alone.

Felicity dipped a sponge in cold water and dashed its contents over that part of Olave's face and neck which were visible to her. The cold shock made the girl turn her head swiftly. She saw for the first time that she was alone with her mother — that Agnes had left the room.

"I am very sorry for you, Olave," said Lady

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Trent, "but you mustn't go on like this, it's bad for you. You must control yourself."

"Please go away—please leave me—" said Olave.

Her face was reddened and distorted with weeping. Her eyes and mouth were swollen and purple.

Lady Trent sat down near her and slipped her arm around her. She drew her closer to her and Olave was too much exhausted to resist the caressing gesture.

"Dear Olave," said Lady Trent, "I want you to remember that I am your friend, not your enemy. Believe me that I have tried to do what was best for us both. It is hurting you now, I know, but some day you will understand better and then perhaps you will thank me for what I have done."

She was thinking to herself: "If I could only be alone with her I could manage her more easily. Aggie doesn't mean to interfere, but she can't help coming between us. She has had the care of her too long and naturally Olave turns to her when anything goes wrong."

Olave drew herself away from the clasp of her mother's arm. She felt at that moment as if her caresses were unendurable. She rose and moved across to the dressing-table, making a pretence at arranging her disordered hair. The sight of her own ravaged and distorted face in the mirror gave her a little shock. The violence of her emotion had utterly destroyed all her comeliness. She looked ugly and—she admitted this reluctantly—wicked. She gazed with horror at her own image. Could that really be Olave Trent whom Guy had once called beautiful?

Felicity seeing that the sight of her own face had produced a calming effect upon the girl went quietly out of the room. But her heart sank at the difficulty of the task that lay before her.

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CHAPTER XXI

OLAVE'S EXTRAORDINARY REQUEST

In past days Agnes Ardern had always imagined that no greater joy could, humanly-speaking, fall to her lot than to have her beloved sister established permanently at Cheldon. She had often earnestly desired and even prayed that this might happen. She had disliked the feeling that the whole responsibility of the estate was upon her own shoulders; she had wished to share it with her co-heiress, Felicity. But now that her wish was granted and Lady Trent had come to take up her abode at Nether Cheldon Manor, with no apparent intention of quitting it again, the realization of these innocent dreams proved to be by no means an unmitigated pleasure. Agnes was soon tempted to acknowledge, although very reluctantly, that her sister's arrival had produced a little crop of complicated difficulties and dissensions, and that it threatened to bring in its train more discomfort than happiness. And the worst of it was that this was far less Felicity's fault than Olave's.

The reason was not far to seek. Lady Trent had come home, after nearly seventeen years of absence, purposely to be with her daughter, to make up to her for those years in which she had neglected her and handed her over to the charge of others. And Olave, who had recovered with such astonishing rapidity from that phase of adoring her beautiful mother, offered her no welcome and, instead of the filial affection she had at least a right to expect, displayed toward Felicity a stubborn reserve, a hostility that was never too well concealed, and which seemed to impregnate the very atmosphere of the Manor with a subtle malevolence.

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Lady Trent exercised toward her daughter an angelic and never failing patience. It even astonished Agnes, who knew her sister to be wilful, imperious, and eager to impose her will upon others. She hardly recognized Felicity in this new guise. It gave a softness to her character that perhaps had been lacking to her old charm and fascination. It had not, however, the slightest effect upon Olave. Most girls would have melted quickly before that charm and assiduous patience and sympathy. But it seemed to Agnes as if Olave were deliberately steeling her heart against her mother.

Agnes was aware that her sister did not blame Olave for this attitude. If she blamed anyone it was Agnes herself, for Felicity still believed that she influenced the girl powerfully. Agnes never tried to defend Olave to Lady Trent, that would have been an error of judgment. But sometimes she was conscious that in her own unshaken loyalty to Felicity she was losing Olave's confidence, while Lady Trent was further than ever from gaining it.

There was a certain exterior harmony at the Manor in those days, such as can generally be contrived when a house is large enough to provide plenty of space for persons of widely-different opinions who are not on particularly good terms with each other because the danger of actual collision is thus reduced to a minimum. But it scarcely concealed the constraint that had imposed itself upon the three occupants who should have been living there in such close and tender intimacy.

Olave was seventeen that September, but she might easily have been taken for two years older. There was nothing of the child about her. Her normal expression was hard and a trifle sullen. When Agnes Ardern looked at her sometimes with a kind of stern sorrow in her eyes she could not

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but perceive that Olave was monstrously and incredibly changed from the sweet and happy young girl of a year ago. The change made her heart ache.

One morning Agnes awoke with this thought in her mind. "I am not doing any good here." She lay in bed and the phrase seemed to tease and pursue her with a kind of worrying persistency. It was a dark stormy day in November, and the last leaves were being ruthlessly and violently torn from the oak-trees in the park by a powerful south-westerly gale. The wind rattled the casements and made the branches of the cedars creak. Torrents of rain fell at intervals and splashed against the windows. Agnes shivered a little as she lay there. In all her life she had never been absent from Cheldon for more than a few weeks. She had almost the feeling that it would fall to pieces if she left it. But she knew that if she obeyed the voice of conscience she would leave it for a considerable time; she would go away from home, perhaps abroad, and by doing this she would give Felicity the desired opportunity of winning Olave.

There had been a slight skirmish last night at dinner. Agnes had not dared afterward go into Olave's room to bid her good-night and administer that gentle reproof which in old days she would unhesitatingly have given. She did not go on account of Felicity. And after she had gone upstairs she heard Felicity walk along the hall and open the door of Olave's room. What passed between them she did not know. Felicity had ceased to discuss Olave with her. She had stayed in her daughter's room rather a long time, and it had made Agnes feel anxious and unquiet and as if she were somehow to blame.

"I am not doing any good here," thought poor Miss Ardern.

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No one had suggested that she should go away, and yet she felt certain that this was what Felicity desired. She must have a perfectly free hand with Olave. Olave must not feel that there was someone else in the house to whom she could go for sympathy and comfort when she and her mother disagreed.

Agnes dressed and went downstairs. Felicity never breakfasted with them, and this was often the only time when Agnes saw her niece alone. This morning Olave appeared a little late and her eyes were swollen as if she had been crying nearly all night. She was silent and sullen, and kissed her aunt perfunctorily.

"Well, Olave?" said Miss Ardern.

Olave made no answer. She drank her coffee thirstily and toyed idly with a piece of dry toast. Agnes pretended not to notice her.

She thought to herself:

"I ought to have gone away before."

She would go abroad, somewhere where there would be warmth and sunshine. A place in southern Italy perhaps. And she would stay away till the spring. For those six months Felicity and Olave should be alone at Cheldon. She pitied them both, and longed to help them. But she could only help them by going away.

Presently she went to her own sitting-room and went through the business of the day, interviewing the agent and then some of the servants. She always devoted an hour or two to these tasks every morning. Her life had not changed, had gone on in precisely the same groove, for more than twenty years. She wondered if Felicity would attempt to take up the burden of these things. She was not fond of business, and she disliked detail. But everything at the Manor would be left in competent subordinate hands. No great harm could be done by leaving the place without her careful supervision for six

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months. Agnes loved the people, tenants and servants alike. She was their friend. They sought her in their troubles and difficulties. She believed, without vanity, that they would miss her. But all these reflections did not make her swerve from her purpose. Her mind was made up and soon she intended to go upstairs and tell Felicity of her resolve.

With a pang she realized that it would be an immense relief to Felicity to learn that she intended to go away for a considerable time. Felicity had perhaps been wishing for this very thing to happen. Agnes had thought out the whole situation very carefully in all its details, even deciding that she would go to Florence first and then to Rome, before she opened the door of her sister's sitting-room.

Felicity was having her breakfast near the fire. She wore a cosy silken wrap with white fur at the neck and sleeves.

"Good morning, Aggie," she said brightly.

Agnes stooped and kissed her.

"Fay," she said, "I have been thinking it over and I have made up my mind to go abroad this winter. You'll be here, won't you, to keep Olave company?"

Felicity gazed at her sister in astonishment. Of course, this was the best solution—the only possible one. But what had made Agnes think of it?

"Has Olave been saying anything to you?" she asked suddenly.

"No, Olave hardly spoke at all at breakfast. She was looking very much upset."

"And you are, of course, blaming me for that?" said Felicity quickly. "I suppose you think I ought to have passed over all that happened yesterday evening in silence?" There was a touch of bitterness in her tone.

"I have not said so. And I do not know any-

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thing of what passed between you after you went upstairs last night."

"I spoke to her very seriously," said Felicity. "All this time I have given in to her in every possible way. I have been too indulgent and it was only making her worse. You must admit that she is very trying. But you must not think I was harsh, Aggie."

"No, I am sure you were not harsh," Agnes admitted quietly.

She was thinking to herself: "How can I leave them? Ought I to leave them?" It seemed like an act of cowardice to go away now, as if she were fleeing from a situation too difficult to be borne.

"But how will you like going away?" said Felicity. "I am sure it's the only thing to be done, but you—you are such an old stay-at-home, Aggie!"

Agnes moved away to the window. There was such a lump in her throat that she could not answer just then. She looked out and saw the gaunt grey wolds colorlessly outlined against the stormy sky. The hill that was crowned by Ardern's Knoll stood up a blunt bleak shape. Felicity seemed to be conscious of the struggle that was going on in her sister's mind for she said more kindly:

"We shall miss you dreadfully. I've never been here without you, and you seem as much a part of Cheldon as the very walls. Still I believe it's the only thing to be done. When Olave realizes that she has only me to look to for everything it will be much simpler."

The thought of leaving Felicity and Olave alone filled Miss Ardern with anxious dread. She had a dim presentiment that something grave—something terrible perhaps—would happen if she were to go away. That glimpse of Ardern's Knoll had put these fantastic fears into her head.

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"You have not, of course, told Olave," pursued Felicity.

"No, I naturally came first to you."

Below she could see Olave walking about in the garden in spite of the torrents of rain. The girl was bareheaded and wore a shining mackintosh coat that completely enveloped her slight form. She disappeared presently in the direction of the stables.

"I think you had better be the first to tell her, Aggie. I should like it to come from you."

Felicity had finished her breakfast, and now she lit a cigarette and leaning back in her chair smoked it indolently. Presently she said:

"You see, last night Olave made a most extraordinary request. She asked me to allow her to learn to be a Roman Catholic. She said she thought it might help her to be good."

Agnes was startled. But she immediately and justifiably traced this desire to the influence of Guy Quinn. He had been a Catholic, and she knew that although he did not claim to be anything but a very indifferent one he had spoken to Olave on the subject. She imagined, too, that he was less indifferent perhaps than he alleged, because he had been careful to tell Felicity about the conditions that regulated a mixed marriage. He might not care a great deal, but he had not been prepared to go to the length of renouncing on behalf of any possible children the heritage of his own faith. She had often pondered over this slight inconsistency in Guy Quinn's conduct. But she had never seen the man and she was inclined to judge him harshly. There were times when she was glad that they had never met each other.

"She is still thinking of Guy," continued Felicity, "and I urged her very strongly to make a great effort to put him altogether out of her thoughts. I

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tried to show her how undignified it was of her to behave like this about a man she was never likely to see again."

"You do not think he has been writing to her?" said Miss Ardern.

"I am certain he has not. How could she have received letters from him without my knowledge? I do not think even Guy would be capable of such a thing as that. And I told her I should not dream of letting her become a Catholic, that she was far too young to think about such things." Felicity sighed. "One thing Cheldon is so out of the world there is no chance of her picking up any knowledge on the sly. I shall let her go to a few dances this winter, if there are any, and perhaps that will take her mind off religion. After all, she is seventeen."

"I think myself it would be a good plan," said Agnes. "She has so few things to distract her. It's getting more and more difficult to induce her to study."

Presently she went away and as she was going downstairs into the hall she saw Olave coming into the house. Her hair was all disheveled, but the rough wind had brought a soft color to her cheeks.

"When you have taken off those wet things, dear, I want to speak to you," she said.

"Very well, Aunt Aggie."

Five minutes later Olave came into the room looking slightly defiant and on the defensive. She sat down and listened while Miss Ardern quietly unfolded those plans she had made for the future. They still sounded, even to her own ears, fantastic and unreal.

Olave's face hardened as she listened.

"Oh, Aunt Aggie, I don't feel as if I could bear it here if you go away! I'm just like your child—

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you *must* take me with you. Let's leave mother behind if she doesn't want to come."

"You are not my child, Olave, and you must do what your mother wishes. You are making me very unhappy. I am wretched at the thought of leaving you here in this wicked rebellious mood."

Olave came over quickly to her side and leaning down pressed her face against hers just as she used to do when she was a very little girl indeed.

"Dear Aunt Aggie, only one thing will ever make me feel good again and that is to see Guy Quinn."

She spoke with an almost defiant frankness. It was a long time since she had mentioned his name to Miss Ardern.

"You will never be allowed to do that, Olave," said Agnes.

"Why shouldn't I? She doesn't love him any more. Why should she want to prevent us seeing each other?"

"Olave, you do not even know if he still wishes to see you. He could never have loved you—you were a child—he was playing with you."

Agnes was ignorant of the confession Guy had made to Felicity. She was speaking the truth as far as she herself knew it.

Olave shook her head.

"I could have made him love me, Aunt Aggie. Besides I am nearly certain you are wrong. I believe that he *did* love me. I believed it still more the day I saw him at Waverton Street!"

"Olave dear, you will never know any peace till you have given up thinking of him. Put him resolutely out of your thoughts. Don't let him spoil your life, these beautiful years of your youth! Learn to be a loving dutiful daughter to your mother who cares for you so much!"

Olave's face hardened.

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"I shall never be that. I thought once for a little while that I loved her almost better than anyone. I wanted her to care for me. But now that's all past. Aunt Aggie, take me with you. I can't be left here, it will kill me!"

"I'm sorry, dear. But your mother wouldn't hear of it and she is quite right."

"It'll be awful here, alone with her."

"Hush, dear, don't say such things. Don't let yourself have such ugly, wicked thoughts!"

"I wish I could feel good again," said Olave at last. "I've never felt like this before."

"You must pray," said Agnes Ardern softly.

Olave took no notice of this speech. She only said:

"It'll be so much worse when you're not here!"

CHAPTER XXII

LADY MERCER'S DANCE

LADY TRENT almost looked forward to her sister's departure, and she really believed that the prospect of so complete a change would be welcome and beneficial to Agnes herself. She did not know of the anxiety and fear that hung like a nightmare over Miss Ardern. Most willingly would she have renounced that proposed journey to Italy, and remained at Cheldon to watch over these two people who were both so dear to her. But after all that Felicity had said on the subject it would have been impossible for her now to withdraw from the contemplated trip.

The very fact that Lady Trent was prepared to face the prospect of the long inclement winter at

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Cheldon showed Agnes that she was at least in deadly earnest in her determination to win Olave. But her chance of success seemed to Agnes but a slender one, for she felt that Guy Quinn's shadow stood eternally between the mother and daughter, arbitrarily dividing them.

The evening before she started she said to Olave:

"Olave, you must try to be happy while I am away. I shall be so worried about you if I think you are not being pleasant and kind to your mother."

"You needn't worry about me, Aunt Aggie," was the answer. "Of course, I shall hate being boxed up here alone with mother all the winter, but I don't suppose we shall either of us die of it!" She gave a little hard, mirthless laugh.

"My dear, I wish I might never hear you speak like that again," said Miss Ardern sadly. "You were always such a dear child, you never used to have a bad or unkind thought in your head. You make me so unhappy."

"I am not very happy myself," said Olave.

"Promise that you will try to behave well and please her while I am away," pleaded poor Miss Ardern.

"It wouldn't be any use my promising, Aunt Aggie. I shouldn't keep my promise for a single day. I know I've grown wicked, but I can't help it."

Miss Ardern looked at her.

"I have been responsible for you all these years," she said; "I have had the training of you entirely in my hands. I do not know what I have done, but I have failed very badly."

Instantly Olave was contrite.

"Oh, you mustn't think that. It's all that has happened lately that has made me what I am."

She kissed her aunt hastily and ran out of the room.

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Miss Ardern's hopes were perforce fixed upon Felicity, and upon a continuance of that loving and apparently inexhaustible patience which she had so systematically displayed in all her dealings with Olave.

"Dear, dear Fay, I do hope everything will go well," she said late that night, when Felicity came into her room looking pale and fatigued.

"I know it isn't going to be easy," said Lady Trent. "Oh, Aggie, I do wish she'd change and be as sweet as she was when we first went to London together."

"I know you will be patient and kind, Fay," she said. "And don't blame me too much. I've done my best all these years."

"I am not blaming you. I blame Guy for everything that has happened. But until she forgets him we shall have no peace."

"You must write to me often. Let me hear how things are going on," said Agnes. "I dare say I shall feel very lonely at first. But I'm sure it's the only thing to do."

She left Cheldon on the following morning, and after her departure an additional gloom seemed to inform the Manor House. The weather was very wet; the short dark December days were bleak and sunless. Lady Trent and Olave settled down to a monotonous somber existence. Perhaps of the two Felicity felt most conscious of the depressing conditions. Her daughter was more accustomed to them, and besides she had definite hours for study every day. Although she had no longer a governess—for Mademoiselle had now left for good—various people came from Cheltenham and Oxford during the week to give her instruction in music, painting and languages.

Felicity gave her lovely clothes and furs, but the

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girl showed an odd tacit obstinacy about wearing them. She would always appear in her oldest frocks, unless Lady Trent asked her to put on a particular dress when she would obey without demur. There was something almost rebellious about her very submission. She obeyed to the letter, but she made no effort to take the initiative and adopt any course that she knew would be agreeable to her mother. She spent a great deal of her spare time in writing long letters to Miss Ardern. Lady Trent was wise enough not to interfere with this correspondence. She watched her daughter anxiously. Sometimes she felt that only a tremendous cataclysm would effect any change in Olave. The mother and daughter had never been so far apart as they were now, and Felicity had never felt so hopeless about winning her love.

Judy Mercer made her début that winter, and in January Lady Mercer arranged a boy-and-girl dance in her honor. Olave was of course invited. Felicity left to herself would certainly have declined the invitation; she disliked the thought of going to the house of these people, whom she only knew very slightly, and who were also friends of Guy's. Olave, too, made some demur, almost entreating that she might not go. But Felicity saw that she needed to be taken out of herself, so she ordered a charming new white frock for her daughter and intimated that she wished her to accompany her.

As a matter of fact Olave enjoyed the dance very much. She was tired of the dullness of her life, and of the absolute lack of companions of her own age. Tom Mercer, who was still at Sandhurst, showed her a great deal of attention and danced many times with her. She had as many partners as she could wish to have, and Tom's attentions set the fashion and made all the young men present

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desire an introduction to pretty Miss Trent. She was, in fact, a brilliant success.

Tom was at first almost shy of this changed and rather disdainful Olave. They had not met for nearly a year, and at that remote epoch he had never hesitated to "rag" her to his heart's content. He had teased her in those days just as he had teased Judy and Babs. But now he was astonished at the change in her; she looked older than Judy and he was aware that she was exquisitely dressed. He thought that she and her mother were the two most beautiful women in the room. Tom was at a susceptible age, and he certainly believed that evening that he was in love with Olave Trent. Judy had always declared that she was plain and he had hitherto accepted unquestioningly this adverse verdict. But now there could be no two opinions about her, and he received plenty of corroboration from the remarks of his friends who were present that night.

Olave aware of his homage accepted it in a cold disdainful manner that piqued Tom. Her careless way of speaking, that had so strong a resemblance to Felicity's, charmed him and made him long to overcome that icy indifference of hers. As Sir Thomas Mercer and the future owner of at least three valuable addresses, he had already received a certain amount of adulation from girls who were older and more experienced than Olave.

"I wish you could come to Sandhurst for the next ball we give," he said. "I know some friends of mine who would be only too delighted to put you and your mother up for it. And it's awful fun, you know."

"I don't expect I should be allowed to come. You see I'm not supposed to be out yet."

"What rot! You look older than Judy. Do you

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think you'll be coming over here again before next Monday? I'm going back then."

"I don't think it's at all likely," said Olave, looking at him as if he were rather a young unimportant boy. "Why?"

"Because I want to see you again. I've got to dance with heaps of dull girls to-night, the mater says it's my duty. I'd much rather dance with you all the time. But if I thought you'd come over and lunch one day and have a round of golf afterward that'd make up for a lot!"

"But I don't play golf," said Olave; "at least hardly at all. You know Judy says I'm a duffer at games."

"I could give you a lesson though," he said, "and it's all rot about your not playing—you ought to learn. What do you do with yourself all day? I never see you out with the hounds."

"No, I'm not allowed to hunt and I haven't got anything to ride now."

"By Jove, you must have a thin time," he said pityingly. "I say, don't you find it awfully dull?"

"Sometimes," she acknowledged. "Mother and I hardly ever go anywhere except for a drive in the motor when it's fine. I hate a closed motor, don't you?"

"Yes," he agreed.

The music had ceased and they wandered down a long heated corridor decorated with beautiful flowering plants in pots. At the end was a conservatory and Tom found two secluded seats behind an enormous palm. He sat and looked at Olave and thought that her dark eyes were as bright as stars. They were alone, and presently across the silence they could hear the faint wailing of the violins in the distance. The sound reached them with an almost melancholy effect.

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"I'm glad to go back for some reasons and sorry for others," he told her.

"Why are you glad? You must have such fun here—all of you—in the holidays." Olave spoke enviously.

"Oh, yes, it's jolly decent," he said. "I think I'm only glad for one reason and that's because that ass Quinn is coming to stay here next week. We got jolly well fed up with him in Scotland last autumn I can tell you. We used to think he never meant to go away. The mater likes him though," he added grudgingly.

Olave turned white to the lips. For many months she had not had any news of him and now to hear his name uttered aloud in this casual manner seemed to pierce her like a sharp sword. She felt a physical pain in her heart that produced for the moment a sensation of actual faintness. Then with an effort she pulled herself together. But she did not speak and her hand clutched the rim of her chair. She let Tom rattle on in his easy good-humored fashion.

Suddenly her silence struck him and he colored up to the roots of his shining fair hair.

"Oh, I'm sorry—I forgot—of course I oughtn't to have mentioned Quinn to you! And after the mater's warning too! I didn't think of it, but of course he was engaged to your mother, wasn't he? Good job she chucked him and you must be jolly glad, too! It was a let-off for you both. I'm sure you would have hated having that chap about the house just as we all do. Besides Lady Trent's a thousand times too good for him!"

He smiled, but Olave's face was set and stony. She almost wished that he would go away and leave her.

She forgot to be indignant at his easy disparagement of her idol. Nothing seemed at that moment

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to signify except the one fact that Quinn was expected to come to Cheldon Park the following week. He would be there—within a few miles of her—and she would not be allowed to see him. But perhaps he did not wish to see her now. Perhaps he hated the very name of Trent, regarding it as synonymous with misfortune and faithlessness. Perhaps he had learned to hate her, knowing that it was on her account her mother had finally refused to marry him. She felt as if she could not bear to see him with hatred instead of love in his eyes, his dear beautiful blue eyes.

Olave felt cold as if she had received a physical shock. Her limbs were trembling, and she felt that if she tried to speak her voice would tremble too and would certainly have an abnormal sound. But Tom scarcely seemed to perceive her silence. Like most people of his age he adored an attentive listener. He was also feeling less afraid of her now, and he found it quite easy to talk to her. If Judy ever called her plain again in his hearing she would get a jolly good snub!

"When—when is he coming?" asked Olave at last, making a determined and quite successful effort to steady her voice.

"On Tuesday, I believe—the day after I go back. He's been seedy, and he asked to come and the mater likes him. Sort of chap that hangs about the house all day, doing nothing at all. He can't ride, at least no one has ever seen him on a horse and I know I'd be afraid to give him a mount. He thinks shooting is cruel, and he doesn't know one end of a cleek from the other. A regular rotter I call him, and Judy can't stand him at any price either. She says she really believes that he's *afraid* of the dogs!"

Olave could not find a single word to say in his defence although now a slow hot indignation crept

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into her heart. Besides what did it matter if all these things—deep offences in Tom's eyes, but surely very innocent and natural in themselves—were true of him? Quinn was Quinn, and only to see him and to speak to him again for a poor five minutes she felt that she would gladly have given the remaining years of her life. Tom Mercer's opinion was nothing to her. The idol was perched too high for any chance word of denigration to impair its spotless white, its peerless beauty. Olave could only think then, with a very passion of longing, of the sound of his voice, the magic soft music of it; the glamour of the blue eyes. The mere mention of his name, after these months of starvation and silence, stirred her heart to a swifter beating.

"I never heard exactly why your mother chucked him," said Tom, "but I don't believe he ever even talked to the mater about his engagement, it lasted such a short time. Why do you think it was broken off?"

He was enjoying his long uninterrupted interview with Olave; it was a pleasure to sit there by her side and cast furtive glances at her radiant bewitching loveliness. And although she seemed rather less inclined to talk to him than she had done earlier in the evening he never perceived that anything was amiss.

"I—I don't think she ever really cared about him," said Olave, stumbling over her words. "Only don't please say I said so."

And again she relapsed into that cold strange silence of hers. She looked at Tom almost as if he had not been there. That old jealousy of her mother was again devouring her. She could feel its teeth and claws. Oh, why had not Guy loved her like that? Why did he not return and seek her out and defy Lady Trent?

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"Don't let's talk about it," she said suddenly; "it seems so stupid to break off one's engagement—I mean it's better not to get engaged at all. I can't understand people not knowing their own minds, especially anyone of mother's age!"

"Ah, but you don't know what a let-off you've had," he said. "It would have been awful for you to have had that chap for a stepfather. I know how I should have felt about it! Still I daresay you're right, it's a pretty rotten thing to do to chuck a chap. I'm sure you'd stick to anyone through thick and thin, wouldn't you?" he added, with a kind of awkward shy tenderness in his voice.

"I believe I should," said Olave proudly, and as she spoke she threw back her head almost defiantly, thinking all the time of Quinn.

"Only it would never be to a rotter like Quinn," said Tom.

Olave's nerves were on edge. She felt that if Tom persisted in talking in this strain she would presently scream or blurt out the whole truth. And through all her pain, the sharp agonizing pain born of the very knowledge that in less than a week he would be here, under this very roof only that she could never see him, she was conscious of a slow dull determination to effect the impossible, to contrive to escape from her mother's vigilance and meet him once more in Ardern's Knoll.

He had been ill; he was coming down to Cheldon to recuperate, to enjoy the fussy quasi-motherly care which Lady Mercer loved to bestow upon delicate gifted young men.

Perplexed at her silence, at her evident unwillingness to discuss the subject of her mother's engagement, Tom ventured to say:

"Of course, I ought never to have told you that Quinn was coming. As a matter of fact the mater

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particularly asked us not to mention it to you; he doesn't want Lady Trent to know he's in the neighborhood. Suppose he's feeling a bit sore about it still—it is rather a smack in the eye when a woman chucks you, isn't it? So perhaps you'd better not let on to your mother."

"I shan't say a word about it to her," said Olave. "She never talks about him."

"I wonder what he did?" said Tom, feeling that Olave must know more and desiring with youthful curiosity to arrive at the truth. "I dare say it was some rotten fool thing that just showed her the silly ass he is!"

But with Olave the unexpected information had done its work. Out of those months of cold silence there had come news of Guy. There was even a hope—a frail faint hope—that she might see him again. She might even discover that he did not hate her, that he had forgiven her for revealing the story of those secret meetings in Ardern's Knoll. The very thought of Guy filled her with the intensest excitement. She suddenly felt alive again, as if she had awakened from a frozen sleep. There was a deep flush in her face and her eyes were shining almost feverishly. She smiled at Tom, the unconscious bearer of good tidings, in a way that made his heart beat.

"I suppose you hardly saw enough of him to realize what a rotter he is," said Tom.

"I only saw him a very few times. And I hardly know what a rotter is," smiled Olave.

She was playing a part now and the thought thrilled her. It made her feel so much older and more experienced than Tom.

Even Felicity noticed the change in her when, after a considerable interval, she returned to the ballroom with Tom. She looked quite radiantly happy.

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"Your little girl is quite a beauty, Fay," said the Duchess of Longshire, regarding Olave attentively through her lorgnette with its vast tortoise-shell handle that made it almost seem like a weapon. "She has quite turned poor Tom's head. Well, she might do a great deal worse—the money's had time to accumulate with such a long minority. Shouldn't wonder if she knows it too. *Il n'y a plus d'enfants* in these days!"

She was famous for her frank outspokenness, but she had known Felicity since she was a little girl, and had even admired the way in which she had insisted upon marrying Digby Trent in the old days, despite the passionate opposition the marriage had aroused.

"This is Olave's first dance," said Lady Trent; "and she's such a strange child—she didn't want to come at all. But I'm sure she has enjoyed herself."

"I'm sure she has," grinned the Duchess. "She's uncommonly like you, my dear Fay. I hope you'll keep her out of mischief, set a thief to catch a thief you know!"

Felicity flushed a little.

"I mean to do my best, Duchess," she said. "And I'm so glad you think she looks nice."

"It's much more important that Tom should think so," said the Duchess. "But you needn't be afraid, you'll soon have her off your hands, perhaps sooner really than you care about. One would miss a pretty young thing like that about the house!"

Olave came away not unwillingly when Lady Trent told her it was time to go home. During the drive back to the Manor she was silent and uncommunicative, and sat there looking tired and drooping. Once Felicity asked her if she had enjoyed

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herself, and she answered, "Yes, thank you, mother," without enthusiasm.

That too early love affair of hers had robbed her of the enjoyment natural to girlhood. Still she had looked unaccountably happy this evening, a fact which Felicity was inclined to attribute to the wholesome attentions of Tom Mercer. It never entered her head that Olave had been listening to tidings of Guy, and that for her the long silence had been at last broken.

CHAPTER XXIII

OLAVE REVISITS ARDERN'S KNOLL

JANUARY was nearly always a cold and stormy month at Cheldon. The wolds were covered with snow and glistened in the pale sunshine, under a sky of broken blue. But there were days and nights of fierce bleak blizzards when the snow was a cruel thing, falling relentlessly as if it intended to smother the world under its white, bitter suffocating blanket that was at once so soft and so terrible. There were days too, during that winter which Felicity spent at the Manor House with her daughter, when the roads were quite impassable, and they had the sense of being imprisoned, of being shut off from the rest of the world in an unhappy solitude.

There were times when Lady Trent actually regretted that she had not accompanied Agnes to Italy, taking Olave with her and trusting to a complete change of scene to effect the girl's cure. She could not congratulate herself that she was making any progress at all with Olave who ever since the night of the dance had become still more silent and re-

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served with her almost as if she had a new additional reason for reticence.

When the snow was too deep to permit of their motoring Felicity spent her days indoors, reading and working by the fire. Olave welcomed the release from those long motor drives, the dreary expeditions to Cheltenham and Oxford, the occasional calls at neighboring houses. She herself was undeterred by the weather and generally managed to go out for a tramp in the snowy lanes, returning with a brilliant color and such an aspect of youth and health that her mother could only deplore the fact that the girl was deliberately and consciously spoiling her life and wasting those beautiful days of youth in useless regrets. Olave was permitted to walk alone, provided that she did not leave their own grounds or go to Ardern's Knoll. That hill was now considered out of bounds for Olave. Felicity had made this stipulation because she feared that Olave might go there to indulge in morbid contemplation of the past, not because she had any thought that she would ever again encounter Guy in that spot of melancholy tradition.

Ten days after the dance there came a break in the weather which had been till then very rigorous. There was a thaw, the snow vanished rapidly, leaving only thin wisp-like streaks on the north sides of lanes and hedges. The sky was blue, a pale sun shone apologetically, and there was a fresh bright hint of spring in the air. Felicity had a cold and could not venture out, but at luncheon she said to Olave:

"You had better go for a walk, hadn't you? I'm afraid of going out to-day, it's so damp. But don't wander far, Olave. You mustn't stay out too late."

"Very well, mother," said Olave.

After luncheon Olave went up to her room and

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put on a rough tweed coat, and a skirt that was cut very short. Her rather shapeless hat was made of the same dark green tweed and she pushed it back from her face so as to disclose her dark hair. She looked at herself attentively in the glass and the effect pleased her. She was always more at home in rough serviceable country clothes. She knew that by this time Guy must have arrived at the Park, and her intention was to take the risk and walk up to Ardern's Knoll this afternoon in the hope that he might again visit the scene of their first meeting. She had had this purpose in her mind ever since the night of the dance, when Tom Mercer had told her that Guy was coming to stay at the Park. But hitherto the weather had prevented her from carrying out the plan. Olave had, however, let her mind dwell upon it with an almost affectionate persistency, till the considerations of conscience had become decidedly weakened. She was comforted by the thought that the weather would also have kept Guy from visiting that ancient haunt, for Ardern's Knoll was always the first of the heights to be covered with snow and the last to be touched by the thaw.

Since the night of the dance Olave had lived upon this pale hope of meeting Guy in Ardern's Knoll during his visit to the Park. She started forth that afternoon passionately determined to seek their old trysting-place. And everything had been extraordinarily propitious to the successful carrying out of the plan, even to the fact that a cold was keeping her mother indoors.

Felicity was utterly without any suspicions. It had never occurred to her that Quinn would dare to revisit the neighborhood, and Lady Mercer had purposely kept his coming a secret. But for Tom's indiscreet revelations Olave would also have remained in complete ignorance of it. Olave felt in-

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tensely grateful to Tom; she had even forgiven him for all the contemptuous, disdainful things he had said of Guy.

She went quickly across the park till she reached the foot of the hill. There was a little path invisible from the windows of the Manor House, and if she followed this she knew that she would be safe from observation. It was slippery and sticky to-day from the heavy thaw, and Olave did not make very rapid progress. But the day was an ideal one, and in the early afternoon sunshine the grass looked almost as green as in springtime. Overhead a lark was singing with the careless facile rapture of its kind, and the song gave Olave fresh hope and courage. Yes, it was Browning who had called the lark "God's poet," and the thought came to her mind then as one utterly inspired, completely beautiful. If only she had not been treading forbidden ways she believed that her happiness would have been perfect. Not that she had any idea of turning back. She had indeed almost succeeded in convincing herself, long before the Knoll came in sight, that she would find Guy awaiting her there in the little wood, and that this time he would be able to tell her anew that he loved her without any "shadowy third" dividing them.

Her disappointment was, therefore, all the more bitter when she entered the wood to find it empty and deserted. She explored each one of the diminutive pale paths that were narrowly traced through the thick bushes. Overhead the bare leafless bough of the beech-trees were delicately etched against the sky, and she could hear the wind moaning and singing in the pines with a sound as of the sea. In the sunshine the pines looked almost lustrously green.

There was no sign of anyone, no trace of footsteps. The silence and stillness, broken only by the

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sighing of the pines and the dull creaking of bare branches in the wind that was never at rest on Ardern's Knoll, were so intense as almost to frighten Olave. She remembered the village saying that Ardern's Knoll was "unlucky," and that some of the older inhabitants openly declared it was haunted. This sense of being haunted seemed to inform the place to-day. In the shadows Olave almost felt that she could see strange unhuman faces peering at her with sinister curiosity, gloating over her disappointment with a kind of ghastly triumph at her discomfiture. Conscience took advantage of this new mood and raised its voice once more. She deserved to be thoroughly punished for coming here. She had deliberately disobeyed her mother, had made a plan and carried it out with a fine disregard of ethical considerations. She thought of murders committed in lonely places. If someone were to come and murder her now, many weeks might pass before they discovered her dead body. Perhaps the snow would fall heavily again to obliterate all traces of the crime and bury her deeply in a smother of white flakes. Olave shuddered as these terrible thoughts took possession of her. She was a little exhausted by her climb in the cold air up the steep slope, and sitting down on the fallen tree-trunk in the open grassy space where she had spent so many radiant hours with Guy, she began to cry weakly as a child cries when suddenly frightened.

She was nervous as well as unhappy, and the long solitude of those winter days at Cheldon was beginning to tell on her. It was the first time she had ever been parted for any length of time from Miss Ardern, and she had begun to realize how greatly she had been dependent upon that comforting wise presence. She had felt her absence keenly, though to herself she had only acknowledged that all her

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present misery was due to the arbitrary separation from Guy.

Olave looked up at last. Her face was wet with tears and she looked both cold and unhappy. The glow had faded from her cheeks. The wind had blown the dark curls from beneath her hat and had given her a somewhat disheveled appearance. It would soon be time to go back to the Manor. All of a sudden she thought of the walk home as a long, almost interminable, one. It would take hours and hours to go down that steep slippery path and gain the safe level ground of the park. The very prospect tired her. And at the end of it there would be tea. Tea alone with her mother in the library with a great fire burning.

She told herself she had been a fool ever to suppose that Guy would come to this place which had been for him such an ill-starred one. But for his meeting with her here last summer he would have been by this time married to her mother. Perhaps they would have been abroad. It was improbable that he would let his thoughts dwell upon Ardern's Knoll. And she—she had been foolish to come, to take that long walk and visit the desolate little wood shorn now of that beloved remembered presence.

Pride had died in her heart, and with it its twin sister, shame. She was conscious only of her love, passionate, hopeless, unreturned, and, as she believed, immortal.

She moved now as if her feet had been shod with lead to the edge of the little plantation. The sun shone in her eyes; the racing wind in a spirit of almost human frolic tore the hat from her head. She had just grasped it firmly with one hand when she saw standing there, in the path just below her, a tall familiar figure. It was Guy Quinn. His back was turned to her and he was smoking a cigarette.

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He had not heard her footsteps and he remained there quite motionless without turning his head.

Olave had one wild impulse to run back into the little wood and to hide herself from him, but some strange terror, some unaccountable emotion transfixed her to the spot. And in that instant's delay Guy turned and stood there coolly regarding her.

"Primavera!" he said.

She gazed at him with wild frightened eyes.

"Primavera," he repeated, and this time he moved a few steps nearer to her. She was reassured by his look; it was kindly, there was even a hint of pleasure. Obviously he cherished no angry feelings for her. Whatever had been the measure of her offence in his eyes, it had evidently been completely forgiven.

He took her cold little ungloved hand in his and held it in a firm warm clasp that gave her strength. Yes, she had changed since the summer. She was a woman now, who, then, had been such an adorable child. But she was far more beautiful. It was the mother's delicate beauty enhanced by the priceless gift of youth.

"Poor Primavera, you have been crying," he said with a kind of whimsical compassion. "Why are you so unhappy?"

Olave had not as yet spoken. Her throat was dry and a lump had risen in it. But her hand lay quietly in his; it had ceased to tremble, and was passive as a frightened bird that has suddenly ceased to fear.

"Do you often come here?" he asked. "It is a chilly spot now." He looked at the brown woodland, the glimpses of green grass alternating with the patches of half-melted snow. Across the valley he could see the grey gables of Nether Cheldon Manor.

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"It is the first time I have been here since the summer," she said at last. "I have been forbidden to come."

Guy looked at her wonderingly.

"What made you transgress, then, to-day of all days?" he inquired, with a flash of amusement in his blue eyes.

How could she tell him that she had come here in the mad hope of seeing him again? She was not supposed to know of his presence in the neighborhood. How could she tell him that her tears were tears of disappointment because she had found the Knoll empty of his living presence, and only inhabited by the malevolent ghosts of the past? The color deepened in her face; she fixed her eyes upon the ground, afraid lest he should read her thoughts.

Still holding her hand Guy Quinn led her back into the shelter of the wood. They sat down on the fallen tree-trunk under the shadow of the great leafless boughs of the beech-trees. The dried fronds of bracken creaked in the wind with a sound that was almost eerie.

She tried to remonstrate.

"I shall be late. Mother told me not to stay out too long."

Guy looked at her and laughed.

"And where is the tyrannical aunt?" he inquired.

"She isn't here. She is spending the winter in Florence."

"Oh, but isn't that a new departure?"

"Yes. But it's a new departure for mother to stay here with me."

At this mention of her mother she thought that Guy's face hardened.

"Oh," she said suddenly, "I never thought you would forgive me. Why haven't you uttered a single word of reproach? I have wanted so often to be

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able to tell you how sorry I was. I never meant to destroy your happiness. I never thought mother would break off her engagement because of me! You must have hated me for not keeping silence. But I am sorry, so dreadfully sorry."

Guy was more touched by this artless confession than he cared to reveal. She, who had had so much to forgive, only thought it wonderful that he should display no resentment. She, who should have bestowed pardon, was only entreating it.

"My dear, *dear* Primavera, it is I who should ask for your forgiveness. Believe me, I have reproached myself most bitterly," he assured her earnestly.

"Reproached yourself?" she repeated. "When you made me so happy? I was only sorry that in return I had given you so much—so much misery."

So she had never blamed him; she had only blamed herself. He had yet to learn how deeply and bitterly she had blamed her mother.

"Lady Trent doesn't know I'm at the Park, does she?" he asked.

"I don't think so. I never told her."

It was a slip, for she had not intended to let him know that she herself was aware of his presence there. It did not escape him.

"But how did you know?" he asked. "I begged Lady Mercer not to advertise my arrival!"

The old adorable crimson color flooded her face.

"Tom told me you were coming," she said in a low voice.

"Primavera," he said, "did you come here today thinking I might be here?"

Olave did not answer and in the little pause that followed Guy drew her gently toward him.

"Did you?" he said. "Was that the reason? Don't be afraid to tell me!"

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"Yes," she whispered.

Guy drew her still closer and kissed her. Olave inexpressibly thrilled by that caress surrendered herself to the sweetness of the moment. She seemed to be transported into some strange delicious heaven.

"Olave," he said, "is it possible then that you have forgiven me?"

It was the first time he had ever called her by her name, and it seemed to bring them into a closer, deeper intimacy.

"I never had anything to forgive."

"Yes, you had," said Quinn savagely. "I tried to teach you to love me last summer. I wanted to be loved by you. And all the time I was practically engaged to another woman. It was very dishonorable and your mother couldn't forgive it. She sent me away." He clenched his teeth at the remembrance of that moment of bitter humiliation. "She told me frankly that I was never to try to see you again."

It was easy to accuse himself to anyone so adorably indulgent.

"But it was very cruel of her to punish you like that. I've never forgiven her for the wrong she did to you!"

Guy looked at her in astonishment.

"Oh, I cared so much that you should be happy," continued Olave vehemently; "it seemed to me that nothing else mattered in all the world! Instead of which, through my own fault—for it was I who told Aunt Agnes—we were all three made most wretched. You, and mother and I!"

"I am perfectly certain Felicity was never wretched," said Guy in a hard, bitter voice. "She never cared a hang about me!"

"She looks sad sometimes, but I can't be sorry for her," said Olave. "I used to think of you and how

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lonely and unhappy you must be, and it made me miserable to feel that it was my fault, because I ought to have kept silence as you said. We needn't have seen each other, you know. And in time—oh, I'm sure I should have been able perhaps to forget a little."

"Oh, my dear, my dear," said Guy deeply moved, "I never meant to make you care like that. But you must believe me when I tell you that I'm thankful now you didn't keep silence, that you *did* speak. Else we should not be here like this to-day."

His mind was fixed upon the problem before him, and he felt that it became increasingly difficult with every fresh development. He had won this child's love, a selfless devotion that was concerned only with his happiness without any thought of her own. Yet the barriers between them and marriage were great and formidable.

"Your mother," he said at last, "refused to marry me on your account. She had set her heart upon having you to live with her, and when she saw that it would be impossible under the circumstances, she preferred to let me go to the wall. You must not blame her for she loved you best. What she did, she did for your sake. And I can be thankful now that she gave me back my freedom."

"She ought to have sacrificed me," said Olave, looking up into his face and wondering how her mother could have had the heart to banish him out of her life forever, whatever his fault. "I could have gone on living with Aunt Aggie, as I had always done. Except for just a little while, I have always liked her better than mother."

She turned then swiftly, suddenly, toward him.

"You never loved me then last summer?" she said, freeing herself from his clasp. She studied his face as if determined to learn the truth at whatever

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cost. "Never at all? In spite of what you said?"

"Yes, I did love you," he said slowly, "but I ought never to have told you so. I was bound in honor not to. It is I who should have kept silence."

His words slowly and exquisitely destroyed that past pain. The cold winter world, with the brown lace-work of the trees, the sodden grass, the pale and luminous sky, became all at once as beautiful as that summer world of flowers and brilliant verdure and golden sunshine which had witnessed their first meeting. And surely she had never felt so perfect a sense of satisfied happiness as she did now. His words, his touch, his caress, poured balm upon those former wounds.

"Last summer you were a child, Olave," he said. "You have changed a great deal, you are a woman now. And your mother's loveliness is nothing to yours." His eyes rested upon her little glowing face.

She rose at last, distressed to find that it was so late. The short January afternoon was drawing to a close, and dusk was already falling upon the Cotswold Hills. They were no longer green or grey but fading to a somber purple. Below in the valley a little thin mist followed the windings of the Chell. The wind had dropped, but in the air, the cold buoyant air that went to her head like wine, there was something of the very sense and breath of spring. Olave's youth responded to it. She felt suddenly strong, as if her whole body were tingling with a new life, had become brave, vigorous, untiring. Color and movement seemed to transform that grey winter world; there was a sense of growing things, of sleeping things awakening to life from a prolonged slumber. It was wonderful to be alive and young in the midst of this first inception of the violent renaissance of spring.

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"It's getting late, I must be going. Mother will be wondering."

"But she'll never guess," he said. "You must come again to-morrow."

"Yes, yes," said Olave.

He bent his head and kissed her.

"I love you. Whatever happens remember that."

And with those wonderful words ringing in her ears, Olave Trent fled swiftly down the hill away from the fatal enchantment of Ardern's Knoll.

CHAPTER XXIV

HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

OLAVE reached the Manor in good time for tea, and to her relief she discovered that Felicity, who had been lying down in her own room, had not yet descended to the library. The girl had time to change her muddy boots and to remove her thick tweed dress. With an instinct to please, born of her new happiness which she found herself wishing to share with the whole world, Olave put on a new white silk blouse and a white cloth skirt which Lady Trent had recently given her. She made a resolution that she would speak more affectionately to her mother, that she would try to make amends to her.

She was sitting by the fire when Felicity came into the room.

Immediately she rose. "Shall I make tea, mother?"

Lady Trent sank into an arm-chair. "Yes, do, dear," she said. "I'm nearly frozen. My fire went out while I was asleep." She looked blue with the cold; her face was pinched. Suddenly something in Olave's appearance attracted her attention.

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"What a color you've got, Olave. The wind has caught your face. Did you have a nice walk?"

Beneath that attentive scrutiny the color in Olave's face deepened. Oh, why did happiness always show in one's face, changing it almost as much as sorrow could change it, although in such a different way? It has been said that love can not be hidden, and that ancient saw recurred to Olave's mind now. She answered carefully in a cold repressed tone:

"Yes, thank you, mother. It was damp though where the snow has melted."

"Where did you go?" asked Felicity.

It was her usual question, but to-day it seemed to Olave to be impregnated with new meaning.

The girl paused for a moment. Then she said:

"I went across the park."

"I hope you were back in good time? I don't like your being out too late on these short winter afternoons!"

"I was back in good time, mother," said Olave, nervously beginning to pour out the tea. "I—I hurried home."

The little meal proceeded in silence.

"I feel you ought to have some one with you when you go for these long walks," said Felicity, drinking her tea.

She did not quite know why, but Olave's flushed and rather excited appearance had awakened a vague anxiety in her mind.

"Did you meet any of the Mercers?" she inquired.

"No, mother," said Olave.

"Perhaps I ought to get another governess for you. Someone strong and active and fond of the country. Not so much to teach you as to be a companion in your walks and games. I should like to find a nice girl a few years older than yourself."

Olave put down her cup.

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"I should hate it!" she said violently.

"My dear Olave," said Lady Trent, startled at the little outburst.

Their eyes met. But while there was entreaty and appeal in the mother's face, in the daughter's there was only a cold and critical hostility.

"I want more liberty, not less!" said Olave passionately. "Aunt Aggie gave me much more liberty!"

The moment she had uttered these words she would have given the world to be able to retract them. She saw how foolish and rash they were, even before Lady Trent gave the inevitable answer.

"You were not very prudent in your use of that liberty, were you, Olave?" she said.

Olave reddened and became silent. She knew she had merited the rebuke, but coming just then it gave her a little sense of fear. What if her mother should guess that she desired an increase of liberty simply to enable her to repeat that past imprudence and to meet Guy Quinn again? Prudent? Lady Trent might as well have preached prudence to the winds of heaven!

Felicity put down her empty teacup, and looked once more at her daughter. And again that flushed, excited face, those strangely-shining eyes, coupled with that passionate demand for an increase of liberty, stimulated her curiosity and evoked within her an unconquerable misgiving.

"Did you meet anyone when you were out to-day, Olave?" she asked.

Olave replied without the slightest hesitation:

"No, mother."

But the question had confused and bewildered her. She felt afraid of her mother, of her penetrating intuitions that hit the mark with such skilled, unerring aim.

Felicity stifled a sigh of relief. She accepted her

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daughter's word without hesitation; she had indeed no reason in the world to doubt it. Olave had, she knew, been strictly brought up to habits of truthfulness by Agnes Ardern. A lie was a sin which Agnes had never overlooked either in her sister or in her niece during their respective childhoods. Almost the only occasions on which Agnes had punished the little Olave very severely were those on which she had detected the child in a falsehood. It had indeed happened only very rarely, for Olave was by nature frank and truthful.

"Well, darling, don't stay out so late another time. You must have been gone two hours. Hortense told me when you came in!"

It was Olave's turn to give a sigh of relief. She made the *amende honorable*.

"I'm very sorry I spoke like that just now, please forgive me. I didn't mean to."

Felicity kissed her. Was Olave going to soften at last?

The next day was both wild and wet. There was a high wind that rioted over the wolds and blew great gusts up the long valley of the Chell that formed a natural trough between two ranges of hills. It was very cold too, and the leaden sky, covered opaquely with thick whitish clouds promised a further fall of snow. Olave's heart sank when she first rose and went to her bedroom window that morning, feeling the passionate desire for fine weather which perhaps belongs exclusively to unphilosophic youth. She could have wept when she saw the trees in the park swaying and bending before that fierce onrush of wind, and the rain falling thickly like a shower of hard, grey arrows.

After breakfast she practised for an hour. Olave had a real talent for music, it was the one thing she cared very much about. Then Miss Carter arrived,

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as was her weekly habit, from Cheltenham to give her a lesson in painting. Olave found it difficult to concentrate her mind; her thoughts were full of Guy, of the prospect of seeing him again that day. She was already subconsciously making plans for an early escape after luncheon.

Miss Carter was an irritable nervous woman, and her pupil's inattention annoyed her.

"I wish you would listen to what I tell you," she said.

"My hands are cold," said Olave sullenly.

She was rebelling inwardly against the restraint and discipline imposed upon her, she who felt like a queen because she was the happy possessor of Guy Quinn's love.

It was true she had not been listening. She was secretly wondering how she could best elude her mother's vigilance and go up to Ardern's Knoll that afternoon.

Of course, it would be doubly dangerous to-day. She had almost believed yesterday evening that her mother had a dim suspicion of the truth. And the lie she had told lay very heavily upon her conscience, which gave her, every now and then, an uncomfortable little prick of shame. Yet, was the price too great to pay for the mad joy of seeing Guy?

It was still raining and a few fine flakes of snow were now mingled with the rain. One could hardly see Ardern's Knoll; it was almost blotted out. Perhaps Guy would think it too wet to venture. Olave tried to control her impatience, her anxiety.

"It is perfectly useless for you to go on with your lesson to-day. I shall tell Lady Trent that I am only wasting my time and yours by coming here," said Miss Carter's sharp, irritable voice.

Olave flung down her brush with a hint of temper. Then she controlled herself with an effort; she did

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not wish any complaints to reach her mother to-day.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said with quick contrition. "I'm afraid you're right, I wasn't listening."

For the rest of the lesson she was diligent and attentive, exerting herself to the utmost to please and mollify Miss Carter. She was rewarded presently by hearing that lady say in a conciliatory tone:

"That's much better. No one can work better than you when you choose."

Olave smiled. She was satisfied that no complaints would reach Lady Trent that day. But she did not feel happy. All that prudent submissiveness, that forced attention of hers, formed part of the intrigue into which love had plunged her. It had given her an astute wariness, a new sense of caution almost of cunning, as if she were playing a difficult part. But she was aware of the loss of simplicity and frankness, and conscience, no longer quiet, was a sharp insistent accuser.

"May I go for a walk to-day, mother?" she asked, when luncheon was over.

It seemed to her that her heart almost stopped beating while she waited with a consuming anxiety for her mother's reply.

The rain had ceased, but the outside world looked singularly uninviting. The ground was damp and sodden, and the wind stirring in the trees and bushes caused whole showers to fall from the dripping branches.

"Oh, Olave, do you really want to go out? It's such a horrible day."

"Rain never hurts me," said Olave with a smile. "It hurts me much more to spend a whole day indoors. And I've been working hard all the morning. I suppose your cold is still too bad for you to come?"

She hated herself for saying this almost with an air of regret.

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Felicity shivered. "Oh, I shall stay in for another day or two to get rid of it. But if you really want a walk you can go out for an hour. But don't go beyond the park or our own fields."

"Very well, mother," said Olave submissively.

Once out of sight of the house Olave ran with long, fleet strides, scarcely stopping till she reached the foot of the hill. It had begun to rain again and the drops beat against her face like a succession of little, stinging, angry spears, being mixed now with a cold sleet. The wind whistled in her ears with a shrill, deafening sound. She was out of breath, and she waited for a few minutes before beginning the steep ascent. She felt to-day that the very forces of Nature were cruelly leagued together to oppose her in her act of disobedience and deceit.

She looked at her watch, and made a careful calculation. Twenty minutes' hard walking would be needed to take her to the old trysting-place. Then half an hour with Guy, a time which would be rudely shortened if he chanced to keep her waiting, and then another quarter of an hour to return home. She would thus be back at the Manor in rather more than an hour. Surely such an absence would be in no way remarkable. She would have time to remove her wet things, and to make herself tidy before tea. There should be nothing to arouse Lady Trent's suspicions to-day. The long, silent duel between the mother and daughter had reached its most acute crisis. Olave knew that all her skill and nerve and subtlety must be exercised in order to avoid discovery and defeat.

She did not make the mistake of undervaluing Felicity's intelligence.

There was something terrible about Olave to-day. She was being consciously and deliberately unscrupulous and deceitful. Last summer in her very inno-

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cence she had allowed Quinn to persuade her that there was nothing wrong about their surreptitious meetings. But now she was not to be deluded. She knew that it was wrong to disobey, to deceive, to betray the trust her mother reposed in her, to utter falsehoods when she was questioned. And in the future there would be more lies, more deceptions.

Eighteen years ago her mother had acted in much the same way. But Olave was not aware of this; she knew nothing of the details of her mother's engagement and marriage, nor did she know how heavily Felicity had paid for that early imprudence. She was still in ignorance of her dead father's character.

Guy was waiting for her. He wore a heavy, dark overcoat and a cap pulled down over his forehead, hiding all his fair hair. Very little of his face was visible, but Olave thought he looked paler than usual. There were dark rings under his eyes making them appear singularly large and brilliant.

Without a word he took the girl in his arms and strained her to his heart. Olave, faint with emotion and exhausted with fatigue, lay there passive and infinitely contented.

Guy, during a long and wakeful night, had extracted one determination from the confused perplexity of his thoughts and desires.

"Primavera," he said, slowly releasing her and looking down into her glowing face, "I love you, and I want you to be my wife."

Once he had imagined he had loved her on account of that fugitive resemblance to Felicity. But Felicity's image had long ago faded, and now he knew that he loved Olave for her own sake, perhaps, too, because she had loved him with such touching fidelity and devotion.

The words seemed to lift her once more into that delicious heaven she had known yesterday.

"Really—really—your wife, Guy? You don't

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think I'm still too much of a child? I've been doing lessons all the morning, and I felt so absurd, so young."

The words brought a smile to his face.

"No," he said, "you are not a child any more. But I am twice your age and I'm utterly unworthy of you and your love." He looked at her curiously. "You are sure you love me, Olave? That it isn't a foolish fancy which one day you'll regret, and which I should be a monster to take advantage of now?"

"I am quite sure," said Olave softly. But she turned her face a little away from him as she uttered the words.

"Well, when the time comes we shall have to take the law into our own hands," said Guy. "Your mother will never let you marry me. When we parted she said we should never see each other again, she forbade me to try to see you. She was beginning to know, I think. If she finds out anything she'll move heaven and earth to prevent our marriage."

"But you mustn't let her come between us," whispered Olave, full of confidence in his strength.

How strange to think of a wedding in which she would be the bride, the central figure. Once only she had attended a marriage ceremony, when as a little girl she had acted as bridesmaid to one of her cousins. But she cherished a very vivid remembrance of the little bride decked out in a white dress, with a wreath of orange blossoms crowning her fair, golden hair, and a long white veil that hung about her like a filmy cloud. Olave had thought her the most beautiful vision imaginable.

"Shall I wear a veil and orange blossoms in my hair, and carry a bouquet of white roses and heather?" she asked.

Guy laughed.

"Oh, you darling baby! Probably not if we run

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away. You'll be married in a traveling dress, I should think, and you won't look a bit like the brides in the *Queen!* But that won't matter a bit, you know."

"Oh, I hope I shall be brave enough to run away if it's necessary," she said.

"We have only our own happiness to consider and no one has any real right to interfere," he said slowly, looking at her. "But because you aren't of age yet your mother can interfere and prevent our marriage if she chooses. She is sure to use her authority. We shall have to be married in a Catholic church, you know, Olave, and that'll complicate matters still more."

She interrupted him swiftly.

"Shall you want me to be a Catholic, too, Guy?" she asked.

"I'd like you to be one if you feel like it. But you must be free, quite free."

"But I want to be. I'd like to be the same as you. And I feel it might prevent me from doing wicked things."

"Wicked things? But what things, my dear Olave?"

"Things such as coming here to meet you and then telling lies about it to mother afterward." She turned away in confusion.

"Does that hurt you so much?" But he was startled and even sharply pained at the revelation. "Did you lie to her yesterday?"

"Yes. What else could I do? She asked me if I'd met anyone I knew."

Quinn's face fell a little; he had not realized that so much practical deception would be necessary. Felicity was evidently keeping a close guard upon her daughter. His very presence in the neighborhood was perilous to Olave. At any moment it might be discovered. He knew now that he would

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have to curtail his visit. The Mercers saw a great many people, and it was not easy to keep his presence at the Park a complete secret.

"I'm so sorry that's been necessary for you," he said. "I hate to think of it."

"But you're not angry? You—you don't blame me?" There was a little tremor in her voice and her eyes suddenly filled.

"No, no," he assured her hastily. "We mustn't lose each other for any childish fear or scruple now. One has to pay, of course."

They walked to the edge of the little wood, Guy's arm lying lightly, possessively, round her neck.

"Oh, Guy," she said suddenly, "it's wonderful to think we are really engaged—that I've got a right to love you."

"Is it?" he said smiling.

They parted at the top of the hill.

"Come to-morrow," he said, "my little wife that is to be."

They had been so sheltered in the wood that Olave was dismayed to find what progress the storm had made outside. As she fled down the steep and slippery path, stumbling as she went, she encountered the full force of the rain and wind. It impeded her progress, and the sharp, hard sting of the rain seemed to flagellate her face and gave her again the superstitious impression that Nature was angrily opposing her. Nature, enraged, was trying to punish her. It deepened her sense of guilt, which always weakened when she was actually with Guy. The early winter dusk had fallen, and somber shadows darkened the woods that hung here and there like purple blots on the lower spurs of the wolds. Olave was a little unnerved by the solitude, the shrill shrieking of the wind, the fierce rain that seemed to wish to scourge her.

All at once her courage left her. She felt like a

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small, very naughty child. Her mind recalled clearly those occasions in her childhood when she had been sharply punished for any deviation from the truth. Her childish sins seemed very small and innocent now compared with this deliberate course of deception upon which she had wilfully embarked. Those ancient faults and their consequences were unpleasant experiences, standing out in dark relief against the background of an otherwise serene and happy childhood. But afterward there had been her aunt's warm and loving forgiveness, and she had had the feeling that her contrition had wiped out the offence, just as the physical correction had expiated it. "Only, I'm too old to be punished now," thought Olave. She had not yet learned that people are never too old to be punished, the process of retribution goes on unceasingly and mercilessly from cradle to grave. An inexorable Nature exacts it for all outrages upon her laws. Of a purgatory of expiation she knew nothing; it was not comprised in Miss Ardern's teaching.

But it was in Guy's mind as he walked home after leaving her. He was genuinely shocked and dismayed by her confession. He felt as if it had smeared the peerless white of his idol.

"I'm teaching her to be just what I hate her to be," he thought.

CHAPTER XXV

GUY'S NEW NOVEL

LADY TRENT saw Olave approach the house with a sense of relief. The girl had been gone more than an hour and a half and it had rained heavily nearly all the time. She had been watching for her

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return from the library window, but owing to the rain and the falling of the dusk it had been impossible for her to see much beyond the garden.

As Olave passed the window she saw her mother standing there and she smiled at her as she went by.

When she entered the house Lady Trent was waiting for her in the hall. There was thus no possibility of Olave's being able to conceal her forlorn plight from her mother. Her clothes were drenched, and the water poured off her rough tweed hat; her soaked boots were muddy with little clots of earth and grass and dried leaves sticking to them. She looked disheveled, almost demoralized, from this long exposure to the elements.

"My dear child, what an age you've been!" said Lady Trent, with the sharp note in her voice that always betrays the irritation consequent upon anxiety. "What possessed you to stay out so long in this weather, especially after all I said?"

The words as well as the tone jarred upon Olave, who felt that a rude hand had been laid upon her transcendent happiness, destroying something of its glamor. The abrupt return to the ordinary work-a-day world, with its manifold little rules and regulations, was disillusioning. She answered resentfully:

"I've only been for my usual walk. When I'm out I forget how the time goes!"

"I shall have to put a stop to these solitary rambles," said Lady Trent. "You're much too old to run wild. Now go upstairs and take off your wet things as quickly as possible and make your hair tidy before tea."

She was again sensible of that vague formless misgiving which she had felt when Olave had returned the day before. What had she been doing? Why had she stayed out so long? Had she been alone all the time?

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Olave moved sullenly away. She went up to her room and examined herself critically in the glass.

"I hope I didn't look as untidy as that when I was with Guy," she thought to herself, a little dismayed at her own disheveled appearance. But Guy had told her she was beautiful and besides she was going to marry him. She repeated softly to herself: "I'm engaged to be married. It's really true. He does love me." It sounded to her both wonderful and impossible. "I wish I could tell Judy. She would never dare snub me again. I shall snub her when I'm married and she isn't!"

She danced and curtsied to herself in front of the long old-fashioned mirror that hung on the wall in a tarnished gilt frame. She pirouetted lightly on one foot, charmed and fascinated by the light grace of her own movements. She smiled back at that happy presentment of herself in the glass. Oh, what a wonderful world! In spite of scoldings and deceptions how wonderful!

Then remembering that Lady Trent did not like to be kept waiting she re-arranged her hair, brushing it back in one full soft wave from her low forehead. She dressed herself very carefully and then went demurely downstairs.

"I mustn't show her how happy I am or she will begin to suspect something," she thought, with that dreadful precocious perspicuity that was the fruit of her little intrigue.

But although she could control her mouth and keep it from smiling, it was impossible to disguise the vivid flush that stained her face, and the shining radiance of her eyes. She was youth and happiness incarnate, defiant of age and wisdom. Unknown to herself, she looked too as if she were nursing some secret ineffable happiness.

Lady Trent, still dissatisfied and anxious, said:

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"Did you meet anyone when you were out, Olave?"

"I—I met the postman," said Olave, hoping to be spared further interrogation.

But Felicity was annoyed at the slight, intentional impertinence. She said coldly:

"You know I don't mean that. Did you meet anyone you know?"

And Olave replied quite promptly and without the slightest hesitation: "No, mother."

But she averted her face instinctively from the cold, searching gaze of her mother.

"I think you don't see enough of girls of your own age," said Lady Trent. "If it's only fine to-morrow I think we will motor over to the Park and see the Mercers. Perhaps Lady Mercer might let Judy come over for a few days. You'd like that, wouldn't you, Olave? I'm afraid it's dull for you. I'll telephone in the morning when we see what sort of a day it is, and ask if it would be convenient."

The suggestion filled Olave with horror. If her mother were to telephone such a message as that it was even possible that she might learn of Guy's presence at the Park. She could almost hear Lady Mercer saying: "Oh, we shall be delighted of course, but, you know, we have got Mr. Quinn staying here," just to prevent the visit from taking place that day. For, of course, they would not want to meet, and Lady Mercer was too tactful and accomplished a hostess to permit such an encounter under her roof.

Olave's face was white with dismay as she answered: "Oh, mother, don't please let us go there! And don't, *don't* ask Judy to stay here. I don't want her to come, we're not friends really."

Something of real terror and appeal in her look and words definitely aroused her mother's attention.

"Why, what's the matter, dear? Why don't you

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wish to go there? I have never been to call since the dance, owing first to the snow and then to this wretched cold."

"I would far rather not go there. And I don't want Judy to come and stay," repeated Olave.

There were tears in her eyes.

"Olave," said Lady Trent, who was passionately anxious to get in some way closer to her daughter and understand the workings of her mind, and yet felt more perplexed and baffled than ever, "I think you must tell me the real reason. You are not a child, yet you are behaving childishly. You must really learn to be more controlled. If there's a good reason for your not wishing to go to the Mercers' I am quite ready to listen to it."

"There isn't any reason, except—that I don't want to see Judy or have her here." Olave's tone was desperate.

"But that is such a silly, worthless reason," said Lady Trent, with a touch of impatience. "You have not quarreled with Judy, have you? You seemed on perfectly good terms the night of their dance."

She was still convinced that this reason of Olave's was insufficient to account for such an extremity of agitation.

"No, we haven't quarreled. But I'd rather be here, alone with you."

It flashed across Felicity's mind then that the Mercer girls might have said injudicious and indiscreet things to Olave about her own engagement to Guy Quinn. Knowing him, as they did, it was quite possible that they had discussed the matter in front of Olave, and might even have commented upon Lady Trent's own conduct in the affair. Perhaps they had questioned Olave more closely than she liked about the reason of the final rupture. And Olave still sensitive and sore upon the subject might justifiably have resented such cross-examination. Felicity was

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unable to account for it, but she strongly felt that this new dislike to seeing Judy Mercer was, in some unexplained way, connected with Guy Quinn. Otherwise it would be difficult to discover a reason for that sudden childish agitation which Olave had just displayed.

Although she did not question her any further then, she realized more than ever her own utter failure to win Olave's confidence. Whenever she tried to penetrate into her daughter's mind and thoughts she met only that stone wall, that icy barrier, of reserve. She had the feeling that Olave, aware of her desire, met it by tacitly shutting her out from all intimacy, refusing her admittance to that kingdom of which Agnes had so long enjoyed the freedom. But the departure of Agnes had brought them no nearer together. Olave lived in a little secret world of her own and resented all her mother's efforts to share it. And Felicity's very heart was crying out for loving admittance!

If she could only find the way to win Olave's love! Once, indeed, she had had an exquisite glimpse of it, but it had been, alas, only a fugitive one, and since then all her efforts had been futile and unavailing. One method of procedure had been no more successful than another. She had been kind and patient and indulgent; she had been severe and peremptory, and even more rarely a little harsh, but nothing had had the slightest effect upon Olave. In face of reproof she would amend her outward behavior, but that was all.

Had Felicity come too late? That was the question she continually asked herself. Would Olave always shut her out? She had even made a great sacrifice for her and in the girl's eyes it had counted as nothing. It had even sensibly widened the rift between them.

"It is my punishment for neglecting her so long,"

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thought Felicity when Olave had left the room. "Yet, I thought one could always come back and pick up the threads with one's own child."

But she refused to regard this defeat as decisive and permanent; on the contrary, it aroused her obstinacy and determination to succeed. There must be a way, and, presently, she would discover it. She felt that Olave was purposely resisting her. It was a definite struggle and this was a sharply-emphasized phase of it. But Felicity never guessed that Guy had entered the lists against her, was aiding and abetting Olave, lending all the force of his character to strengthen her in that mute combat.

"I don't really mind deceiving her a bit," thought Olave recklessly, as she went upstairs to the schoolroom. "It only really hurts me to deceive Aunt Aggie."

Some day when she was Guy's wife she would seek out her aunt and on her knees she would entreat and implore her to forgive her. She would make full confession of all that had been false and deceitful in her conduct. It should be one of her first acts after she was married and already, in imagination, it seemed to Olave almost passionately dramatic. There was no room for Lady Trent in that pathetically-pictured little scene.

Although Felicity renounced the project of taking Olave over to Cheldon Park there was no opportunity for her to make even a hurried visit to Ardern's Knoll on the following day. She was condemned on two successive afternoons to go for a long drive with her mother in the motor. Lady Trent always enjoyed the swift movement and she remained out as long as possible. Circumstances compelled Olave to accept the invitation to accompany her without demur. Nothing but the plea of illness would have been of any use as an excuse for not doing so, and in that case she would not have

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been permitted to go out at all. She was too wise to betray any unwillingness or disappointment, lest Lady Trent should become suspicious as to their cause.

Olave felt more and more like the principal person in a drama. She was playing a difficult part and one false step would certainly prove fatal. She knew, too, that she was playing for a great stake, although she was too young and still too ignorant to understand precisely all that it involved. Her love for Guy ruled her absolutely. To be faithful to him entailed, alas, her being false to others, but his easy sophistries had almost convinced her that she was acting quite justifiably. All her thoughts were centered around him, and the rest of the world hardly existed for her except in its disagreeable power to keep her from his side. This struggle for the possession of him dominated her thoughts; it made her abnormally alert, wary and careful. She had almost ceased to lament the falsehoods and petty deceits that had become so necessary to the successful playing of her part; they were the inevitable, if disagreeable, side-issues that had to be encountered. Her present caution was only the prelude to a greater boldness in the future.

But those two days of separation seemed to her an eternity. She submitted to Felicity's will without any manifestation of rebellion, with even a cleverly simulated eagerness. She succeeded in lulling her mother's suspicions and misgivings, and this stood her in good stead when on the third day the motor needed repairs and they could not use it.

"You can go for a walk if you like this afternoon, dear," said Lady Trent of her own accord. "It will do you good. It's so fine, and this frost has made the ground dry and hard."

"Thank you, mother. Won't you—won't you come with me?"

Olave uttered the question hesitatingly.

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Felicity shook her head. "No, I hate walking in winter. But to make a change you might go down to the village and post some letters for me."

"I thought you didn't like my walking to the village alone," said Olave.

"Well, for once I mean to break my own rule," said Lady Trent brightly. "You may start quite soon, Olave, as I want you to be back in good time."

"Very well, mother," said Olave submissively.

She did not dare make a second objection. The letters would have to be posted somehow. Perhaps she could give them to Guy, always supposing that he were there to-day. She had failed him on two afternoons in succession and he might by this time have left the Park. His movements were always hurried and uncertain.

Before starting she went to her mother's sitting-room.

"Are your letters ready, mother?"

"They're on the table," said Felicity absently.

She was sitting by the fire reading a novel. Olave glanced over her shoulder as she passed and saw that it was Quinn's most recent book, published last autumn. The sight of his name in big, gold letters on the scarlet cover made Olave color up to the roots of her hair. She turned quickly away and her heart beat a little faster. She longed to read the book. But some day she would read all that he had ever written.

Lady Trent put down the novel quickly, and stretching out a slim hand said with a kind of wistful softness:

"I hope you'll have a nice walk, Olave, darling."

Olave took the hand in hers and moved by a sudden impulse stooped and kissed her mother. She was so happy that she could not bring herself to conceal it utterly. She had a wish almost to share it

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with others, as if her own heart was too full to hold it all. She could not deny her mother that embrace which the gesture seemed to invite.

Felicity, deceived into thinking that Olave was thawing toward her, drew her down close to her and kissed her repeatedly, murmuring: "Dear, dear Olave!"

What if this were the beginning of better things between herself and Olave? When the girl had gone out of the room she returned to Quinn's novel, feeling almost hopeful about the future.

The book was both interesting and clever. She could forget her anger and indignation against the man in her admiration for his genius. And in this novel, much of which had been written, as she knew, under her own influence, Guy had disclosed many beautiful and tender thoughts that enchanted her in spite of herself, so that she felt again something of the glamor which once his presence had had power to cast upon her. If only he had been straight and honorable! He could write so splendidly about those qualities, almost as if they were passionately dear to him, why therefore did he fail so signally in truth and honor? There was an odd kink somewhere in his character, but Felicity never attributed it to the right cause. She had no knowledge of what theologians call the "state of grace," from which if a Catholic once departs, without taking any steps to recover that salutary condition, he must necessarily be the prey of things evil.

"How thankful I am I didn't marry him," thought Felicity. "I should have adored him, I suppose, and yet I should have had to be perpetually making excuses for him to myself, and then perpetually forgiving him."

She put down the book and gazing into the fire yielded herself up to thoughts of Quinn. His book

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had awakened memories of him that were tender and rather sad; she could never think of him without a certain regret.

The man had fascinated her, for Guy had the power of fascinating women and often he enjoyed using it. The conquest of Felicity Trent had presented some initial difficulty. He was aware that her gay outward charm concealed something that was prudent, cold, elusive. She was also one of the proverbial-burnt children who retains a permanent and peculiar dread of the flames. Her first experience of marriage had left a profound impression upon her, and Guy knew that she had at last accepted him with a reluctance that proceeded from those early memories.

But it was all over now, and she was at heart glad rather than sorry, although there were bound to be moments when the loneliness and inertia of her present life pressed rather heavily upon her. And she seemed to be as far as ever from her main objective of winning Olave's love. That little sudden softening to-day had probably meant nothing at all. No, she did not deserve and was not destined to reap where Agnes had sown and tilled through long patient years.

CHAPTER XXVI

ENTER ALICK CLIBBORN

"So you have come at last, my Primavera," said Guy Quinn.

The adventure had become a serious matter to him. During the past two days he had suffered torments from the non-appearance of Olave at Ardern's Knoll. She would have been flattered and almost

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incredulous had she known of his very genuine concern and anxiety on her behalf. Was she ill again? That was one of his conjectures and, perhaps, not the most unwelcome one. Had Lady Trent become aware of his presence in the neighborhood from which she had attempted to banish him forever? He had spent long hours each afternoon in pacing up and down the path within the wood, trying to keep himself warm in the keen frosty air, and wondering what had become of Olave.

No wonder that he had loved her at first sight, even when he had believed his heart to belong wholly to another woman. But Olave was in a sense Felicity, only with the added grace of youth, with a warm, eager heart still disillusioned, with a love that mocked at prudence. They were strangely alike and yet so different. Both had the same beautiful eyes, the same charming speaking voice. But though once he had made himself believe that he loved the mother, it was the daughter's image that was enthroned now in all his thoughts and dreams. It was Olave whom he loved irrevocably, eternally.

"Oh, did you really come? Did you wait for me?"

She lifted her face for Guy's kiss. It was a long one, as if to compensate for those empty hours.

"I came and I waited for you," he said a trifle grimly. "I believed that calmer counsels had prevailed. What kept you, Olave?"

"Mother," she said. "I had to drive with her on both afternoons. I began to be afraid she must have guessed something, she was so determined I should go with her in the motor. But I think it was only perhaps to punish me for staying out so late on Tuesday. I was late, you know, Guy, and frightfully muddy, and she met me in the hall so there was no escape."

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She raised her eyes and looked at him as she spoke. It was a look full of innocent adoration that touched him inexpressibly. There had always been something fearlessly critical in Felicity's gaze when she looked at him. It was the delicate quality of this child's love that thrilled Guy.

"And so you were here all the time," she said. "I was almost afraid you would not come to-day because I had failed you twice."

"Olave," he said rather grimly, "I know that I have not given you great reason to trust me in the past. But you can trust me now."

"Oh, but I do perfectly trust you," she assured him. "I knew you would come if you could."

"And your mother—do you think she suspects anything?"

Olave shook her head.

"No, or she wouldn't have let me walk alone to-day. She told me, though, to go to the village and post some letters. I shall never have time to take them now so I was going to ask you to post them for me."

"Of course I will," said Guy, putting them into the pocket of his coat.

"You won't forget, will you?"

"No, I won't forget," said Guy.

He led her along the path and up to the fallen tree-trunk.

"And now, beloved, we must talk over our plans for the future," he said. "For, you know, we must make plans. It won't be prudent for us to write to each other and I don't think it will be wise for me to remain in the neighborhood much longer. Any day your mother might hear, and then we should never be allowed to meet. I feel as if we were living on the edge of a volcano, and it isn't fair to put you in such a cruelly false position. So I've made a sort

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of rough plan and that is that you should marry me in about a month's time. You'll have to come up to London somehow and I'll arrange all the rest—the church and all that sort of thing. It'll be difficult because I'm a Catholic, and I'm afraid you'll have to make your own plans for escaping—I can't help you there, Olave—but you are clever and resourceful, you must elude them somehow."

"I might slip out early and walk to the Junction and catch the seven-thirty to town," said Olave. "It only stops once, at Oxford."

"And once in London you would only have to get into a cab and drive straight to the church. That part will be quite easy. Will you risk all that for me?"

"Yes," said Olave.

"You've got the courage?" he asked.

"Yes," she said again, though her heart sank a little at the thought of that lonely journey. Just for a moment too the thought that it was wicked to run away to get married came into her mind. What would Aunt Agnes say? Would she ever receive her again?

"You'll have to be frightfully careful, my dear," said Guy.

He had done many rash and imprudent things in his life, some of which he had sincerely regretted, but he had never yet tried to run away with a minor. He could only hope that Olave was not a Ward-in-Chancery to complicate the matter still further. But her pluck and spirit astonished him.

"Olave," he said, " many people would tell you that I am doing you a great wrong in taking advantage of your youth in this way."

"Would they say that?" she asked. "But then I shall be doing wrong too, Guy, just as much as you if not more. You are your own master and you

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won't be disobeying or deceiving anyone. But I shall be doing a wicked thing, I suppose, in disobeying and deceiving mother. Even to-day I'm doing wrong in coming here." She crept a little closer, and Guy's clasp of her hand tightened as if to give her courage and support. "And then it's different for you, it can't be so *fearfully* important! I mean you have loved other people, mother for instance, but I've never loved anyone but you."

"Oh, you're wrong there," he said smiling. "You make me feel as if I'd never truly loved anyone before."

"Don't you wish," she went on, "that we could be openly engaged? I should love to have a trousseau and a cake and lots of lovely wedding presents! My cousin Beatrice had the loveliest cake you ever saw. And I do so long to tell Judy!"

"*Tell Judy?*" he repeated, in a tone of horror. "Why, you must be mad to think of such a thing! You might as well publish our engagement in the Morning Post at once as tell any of the Mercers! How Lady Mercer came to have such children I can't imagine—they are perfect terrors!"

"Oh, I didn't mean I was going to tell her—only that I should like to. It's so wonderful to be engaged, Guy!"

"Is it?" he said laughing. "But you mustn't mind not having a trousseau and presents. We can buy lots of things when we're on our honeymoon in Paris. And you shall have the cake all right, you darling baby!"

"Paris?" She caught eagerly at the word. "Shall we really go there? I've never been abroad, you know."

"We'll go to the real South then," he said. "Florence, where you shall look at your beautiful namesake in the Accademia. Then Rome and Naples

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and Capii, and Sicily, and then across the sea to Tunis, and the desert that lies south of Tunis. We'll wander like two Bedouins with our camels and our tents!"

"What a beautiful idea, Guy. I shall simply love it."

"No, you mustn't love it. I must have every bit of your love," he assured her smiling. She was so young, such a child in many ways, that his heart reproached him anew. "But talking of presents, I went to Cheltenham yesterday morning, and got this for you."

This was a velvet case which when opened disclosed a marquise ring, heavy, antique, set with fine brilliants. In the cold winter light the flashing stones held a sharp frosty radiance. He slipped it on to her slim brown finger.

"There, Primavera! How's that for an engagement ring? Doesn't it make you feel really and truly engaged to be married?" He watched her with a whimsical expression in his blue eyes.

And again he had the thought: Was it wise or fair to capture this ardent flame-like spirit in its young youth?

"Oh, Guy, it's perfectly splendid." Her eyes danced. But as she raised it to her lips he had a sudden longing to drag her hand away.

It was cold sitting there in the wood to-day. Every brown twig, every crisp shriveled leaf, as well as every little spear of grass bore a rim of hoar-frost that fretted its edge like a tiny saw. A sharp restless wind blew against their faces. Between the boughs the high sky-spaces were filled with colorless white light.

When Olave was with Guy she felt as if their one relentless enemy was Time. How he lagged with leaden feet when they were apart; how maliciously

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he raced as if borne along on swift, strong winds when they were sitting thus together, the happiest lovers in the world.

"I feel so strong when you're there," she told him; "it's when I'm alone I feel afraid. Sometimes I think it isn't only mother who's trying to separate us." She looked nervously round the little glade at the somber shadows that now were falling there. "Do you never feel as if this place were inhabited by strange things, horrible things, that are trying to hurt us? Once, you know, a royal chieftain was buried here and my great-grandfather had the barrow opened. I have sometimes thought that perhaps the dead man resented being disturbed and so he punishes people who come here."

"But isn't that a silly superstition, Olave?" he said gently.

"There is a girl called Harriet in the village," continued Olave, "people say she used to come up here and meet a man who was in love with her. And one day I saw her crying and someone said her father had been beating her. And the man went away—he never came back. Harriet still lives in the village, but people don't like her. I used to feel sorry for her and I spoke to her once, and she said there was bad luck in Ardern's Knoll and that no one knew that better than her ladyship!"

Guy imagined that Harriet's history might be a less innocent one than Olave, in her ignorance, supposed. Still village traditions of bad-luck and hauntings were generally founded upon something more substantial than mere superstition. He wondered, too, what part the Knoll had played in Felicity's own story.

"Some day you'll be able to laugh at these fears, my darling," he told her.

"Guy, I must go. We've been here ever so long

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and see how dark it's getting. I couldn't have spent all this time in going to the village to post a letter!" She looked seriously alarmed.

"Just a moment," he urged.

"I must really go. Guy, you mustn't keep me!" She broke free from him then, for to-day he found it more difficult than ever to part from her.

"By the way, don't come to-morrow. I shall be in London all day arranging things! But the day after—you really mustn't fail me!"

"Yes—yes—the day after—" she called back, as she set off down the hill.

He liked those sudden, swift, strong movements of hers, fleet and lithe; the sure poise of her that was so splendidly graceful. Olave ran with the swift grace of the boy athlete. She seemed to him to form part of that wild austere Cotswold landscape, which, bleak and unspoiled, lifted its face serene and unafraid to the wild sky, and met the fierce onslaughts of the winter storms. Olave possessed something of that austere simplicity, that confident courage. She was not afraid to take her life into her own hands and order it as it seemed good to her. And when he reflected that she was doing this for his sake, because of her all-dominating love for him, he felt humbled and ashamed. He was so unworthy, he had encouraged her remorselessly to pursue tortuous forbidden ways. Would she ever forget those lessons? Would they not hurt the very soul of her? Nay, for some day when she was all his, he would lead her into the paths of beautiful repentance. She should learn what his Church could give of absolving pardon. But he drew back as this thought came into his mind. Who was he to lead Olave, he who so long had been a prodigal son, careless, astray?

He turned abruptly away and as he went down the hill the wind cut his face like a knife. He hurried

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back to the Park, completely forgetting Felicity's two letters that still reposed in his pocket.

Thanks to her swift running Olave reached the Manor before the hour fixed for tea. A motor at the door denoted the presence of visitors, which gave her even more margin in which to take off her outdoor things and tidy her wind-blown hair. When she went downstairs she saw that the motor had disappeared, and she found her mother alone in the library.

"I have had an unexpected visitor," said Felicity. "Alick Clibborn has been here. He is staying with the Longshires and they told him I was here. You have never seen him, Olave, but he is your godfather, and he is a very old friend."

Felicity had been cheered by the visit. She had known Clibborn before her marriage to Digby Trent; he was a cousin of the Duke of Longshires, and had just retired from an important appointment in India, in which country he had spent many years. Felicity had enjoyed the quiet talk with him over the fire. She had invited him to luncheon on the following day; she was anxious that he should see Olave.

"You must ring for some fresh tea, I had mine early," said Lady Trent. She came over to the fire and stood there for a moment, looking at her daughter. "Did you post my letters, Olave?" she asked suddenly.

Although Olave was startled by the unexpected question she answered without any hesitation: "Yes, mother."

"You went to the village?"

"Yes, mother," repeated Olave.

But her answer was less confident. She had a moment's hideous fear that Felicity knew or guessed something of how her afternoon had been spent.

"Did you meet anyone you knew?"

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"No, mother."

Her voice had regained assurance, yet she loathed herself for the ease with which she had accustomed herself to lying. Although it was done for Guy's sake, she felt that in his heart he must think a little less well of her because she was compelled to utter these degrading falsehoods. Oh, how glad she would be when she was married to Guy and need never tell another lie as long as she lived. She even wondered if she would one day receive some terrible punishment for all her wickedness, and what form that punishment would take. Perhaps it would be that she would be discovered, and that she and Guy would be separated forever. She had these fears always directly she had left him; while he was with her, her offences seemed small and insignificant in her own eyes, they formed part of the price she was willing and even eager to pay for the joy of seeing him. But here alone, without him, under the calm scrutiny of Felicity's frank gaze, she felt ashamed and degraded at the dishonorable vision of herself, soiled and stained by those mean miserable sins of deceit.

She was doubly ashamed too when she saw how readily her mother accepted her statements, and the trust she put in her word.

"Mr. Clibborn is coming to luncheon to-morrow, Olave," said Lady Trent. "I want him to see you."

Olave was relieved to think that to-morrow Guy would be in London, there would be no need for her to make an excuse to escape.

When she went upstairs that evening to dress for dinner, she took Guy's ring from her pocket and fastened it to a long piece of ribbon which she slipped over her head. It lay hidden close to her heart and sometimes when she moved she felt the hard edge of it rubbing against her body.

She whispered softly: "Dear, I love you." Some

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day she would say those very words to Guy, perhaps on their wedding-day when she was his wife.

When she came down that night, looking tall and graceful in a white dress cut very simply, Felicity could not help noticing the change in her aspect, so softened, so filled with a kind of quiet restrained joy. It aroused her anxious attention.

"What has made Olave look like that?" she thought.

But she did not ask any questions. She dared not force that guarded frontier of Olave's icy reserve.

She wondered what impression she would make upon her old friend, Alick Clibborn, who seemed to take a kindly interest in the god-child he had never seen. Almost, this afternoon she had been on the point of telling him more about Olave, of asking his advice. He was very wise, and had a deep, profound, although compassionate understanding of men and women.

But something had kept her from doing this. She did not want him to know the actual reason why she had broken off her engagement to Guy Quinn. She felt ashamed of disclosing Olave's part in the matter. They had spoken briefly of her own engagement, and Clibborn had said in his straight, frank way:

"I'm very glad you didn't marry him, Felicity. He wasn't at all the man for you from all I can hear about him."

It comforted Felicity to hear him say that.

He came over to luncheon on the following day and Olave found herself confronted with a handsome man, not much over forty, with thick iron-grey hair and dark iron-grey eyes that had a very keen, penetrating look. It was a look that made Olave slightly uncomfortable, because she felt almost as if he were capable of detecting the fact that she was nursing a rather dishonorable secret. If he knew,

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what would he think of her? She was at a sensitive age when she ardently desired the good opinion of others. But he took very little notice of her and talked almost wholly to Felicity.

Suddenly he said:

"Felicity, are you equal to a walk? I'd like to climb up to Ardern's Knoll this afternoon and look at the view. We ought to be able to see for miles to-day."

"You'd better ask Olave to take you," said Felicity laughing; "she takes immense walks."

"No, I want you to come," he said, a slight shadow crossing his face at this hint of reluctance on her part.

At the mention of Ardern's Knoll a faint flush came into Olave's face. Then she drew a long breath as if of relief. What a mercy to think Guy was in London, that he would not be found in the wood if her mother decided to go there to-day.

"I'm a bad walker you know, Alick," Lady Trent told him, "but we can motor as far as the stile, and then perhaps I shall be able to accomplish the climb all right."

Olave still had the uncomfortable sensation that by going up to the Knoll they would make some discovery concerning Guy. But it was impossible, she told herself. These were idle fears, born of that sense of guilt which seldom left her now. Yet she almost wished they had asked her to accompany them.

"That's a very good-looking girl of yours, Felicity," said Clibborn, as they climbed the steep pathway up to the Knoll about an hour later. "I suppose you will soon be thinking of her marriage."

"Oh, no, not yet, she's too young. She's only seventeen."

"She looks more," he said.

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Felicity turned to him sharply.

"What do you think of her? You read people so well! And I should like to know."

"My dear Felicity, I am not a wizard. I think her very pretty, very charming. In those respects she resembles you. But she lacks your frankness of disposition. That's a pity, to my thinking, in such a young girl."

Felicity felt a little angry with him, because he had in a sense laid a firm hand on her own fears as if compelling her to recognize them.

"Oh, I think you are making a mistake, Alick. She's quite frank really."

He said cordially: "I'm delighted to hear I'm wrong. One may get quite a false impression of a person although I've hardly ever made a mistake in judging a man on this particular point. But with a very young girl it's different, perhaps. I'm sure Olave is everything your daughter ought to be."

But instead of silencing her fears he was arousing them to fresh vigor. He had read Olave like a book; he had hit upon the very thing she was afraid he would discover. Felicity remembered the episode of last summer, the frequent clandestine meetings with Guy in Ardern's Knoll, so cleverly contrived and competently carried out, discovered, too, by a mere chance. She was almost thankful she had not followed her impulse yesterday and told Clibborn more about Olave. She had felt at the time it would not be quite fair. Her daughter was very dear to her and she must learn to manage her alone.

"I suppose you're very intimate," was his next remark; "you ought to be more like sisters than mother and daughter. There hardly looks ten years between you."

"No, we're not as intimate as all that," she felt obliged to confess. "You see, I have been away so much, I left her entirely to Aggie. We are beginning

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to know each other now, but I've a lot of lost time to make up for. That's been my fault, Alick, and you must blame me, not Olave."

"I never blame you, Felicity. I daresay, you've made mistakes, we all have. But I at least know all that you suffered." His voice was dry and emotionless but there was an odd softening in his face as he looked down at her. They hardly spoke again till they reached the top of the hill.

They stood there for a little time, looking at the view which was wide and spacious to-day under a very clear, wind-swept sky. In the far distance they could see the pale-grey outlines of the Malvern Hills.

Presently he said abruptly:

"Let's go into the wood. You ought to rest before starting back."

He pushed apart the bushes, holding them thus until she had passed along the little overgrown path. As they came upon the open, grassy space where lay the fallen tree-trunk, Felicity saw something grey lying on the ground. She went forward to pick it up and saw with a shock that it was a glove. Instinctively she looked inside the wrist to see the name of the maker. Her fears were confirmed. It was Olave's glove, one of several similar pairs she had bought for her in London. It did not look as if it had been lying there very long, it was only slightly stiffened from the combined effects of dew and frost. It seemed to suggest that Olave had been quite recently in Ardern's Knoll.

Alick Clibborn pushed something away with the point of his boot.

"I suppose this is still a favorite trysting-place, Felicity," he said; "someone seems to have been smoking here quite recently. I have noticed several cigarette ends. And you've found something, too, haven't you?"

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"Only—a glove," said Felicity. Her mind was full of Olave. When had she been here? And why had she come? Was it to meet Guy? For the first time she distinctly believed that Guy had something to do with Olave's recent mysterious mien.

Clibborn made no further comment, partly because he perceived that Felicity was looking both distressed and perturbed, and partly because his mind was full of a more personal matter.

"Felicity," he said suddenly, "do you know why I made you come here to-day?"

"No," said Felicity absently, and then recollecting herself with an effort she added, "Yes, of course, to look at the view, wasn't it? It is always beautiful from here when one has the courage to do the climb. I must confess I haven't had the courage for many years."

"Felicity, do you really believe a man of my age desires passionately to look at any view in the world?"

"Then why did you take the trouble?"

"Because I wanted to have the opportunity of asking you for the third and I hope the last time to be my wife!"

Having said the words a deep silence prevailed. Felicity noticed small sounds that she was not conscious of before, the sleepy twitter of a bird, the fall of a dried leaf, the little movements that can always be heard where there are trees. She was not extremely astonished at Alick Clibborn's speech. It was true that it was the third time he had asked her to marry him. The first time had been just when she was about to get engaged to Digby Trent, a course from which he had in vain endeavored to dissuade her. The second had been on his return from India, a year after Digby's death. He had gone back feeling very sad and hopeless, and, although he had always made a point of seeing Felicity whenever he

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was in England, he had never again till now renewed his suit.

"You are very faithful, Alick," she said at last.

"Yes. I have an unfortunate inability to forget, which, I suppose, amounts to the same thing."

"I wish you would try to forget me," said Lady Trent.

"That is not true," said Clibborn. "Confess you were pleased to see me yesterday."

"I was delighted. You are such an old friend."

"I am sick of being an old friend," he told her with a smile.

"I couldn't possibly marry now on Olave's account," said Lady Trent.

"Why on Olave's account?" he inquired imperturbably.

"She wants all my love and attention. I'm anxious about her sometimes. I couldn't go away from her again."

"You need not leave her at all. She can make her home with us. I'm never going back to India, Felicity. As I told you yesterday I have retired, thanks to my old uncle's legacy."

"Yes, I'm glad you're not going back. I've often felt I should like to ask your advice when things have worried me. But I can't marry you, Alick. I've an idea you might be a little hard on Olave."

"And why should I be hard on Olave?" he inquired.

"She isn't always nice to me. Girls aren't, you know—I think it's the modern way. It's odd though because Agnes is so old-fashioned and I can't imagine how Olave learned to be modern."

"I should never dream of interfering between you and your daughter. That's to say unless you gave me permission to say a few words to her. I've an idea I could make her listen."

He was puzzled, because only a few minutes ago

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Felicity had not been willing to acknowledge the existence of faults in her daughter, and now she was making little reluctant revelations that threw a new and not too agreeable light upon the subject.

"There's something wrong; you ought to be such friends," he told her. "You ought to have no end of fun together. Can't you explain? But you were always elliptical, my dear Felicity!"

"No—no—it wouldn't be fair. Olave isn't really to blame. I don't think I want to tell you any more, Alick."

"Then I won't ask you," he said, "but I can promise you this. If you'll be my wife, Felicity, I'll never be anything but kind and indulgent to Olave."

"I wish you had not asked me to marry you here," said Felicity suddenly. "Perhaps you don't know, but it was here I promised to marry Digby. And the villagers always say that the Knoll is unlucky and haunted."

Clibborn laughed.

"You're not superstitious, are you? Well, take your time and think it over. Only don't keep me waiting too long."

Felicity rose.

"Come back to tea, Alick. You shall have a talk with Olave."

As they passed out of the wood, Alick Clibborn had a strong presentiment that this time Felicity would give him a favorable answer.

CHAPTER XXVII

LADY TRENT GOES TO ARDERN'S KNOLL

After Clibborn had gone that day, Felicity was alone with her daughter in the library when some letters were brought to her. She glanced at them and then said with some impatience:

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"What a stupid woman Mrs. Smith is! She has never sent me a telegram as I told her to when I wrote yesterday. I ought to have got it hours ago. You are quite sure you posted my letter to her, Olave?"

For a moment Olave felt almost sick with a hideous anxiety. What if after all Guy had neglected to post the letters? What if he had lost them? She sat there very still but her heart was beating so violently she felt that its thumps must be actually audible.

"You did post them, didn't you, Olave?" Felicity repeated her question rather emphatically. And the sudden remembrance of Olave's glove, found by chance in Ardern's Knoll, gave a keen edge to her anxiety.

"Yes, mother," said Olave.

It seemed to her very hard that she should have to repeat that miserable and degrading little lie just because Guy had been careless and forgetful. Very soon she made an excuse to escape to her own room. She was afraid of Felicity just then. Did she really know anything? Was she trying to ascertain the truth? Still, Olave knew that an immense deception such as she was now planning would inevitably require to be supported by innumerable petty falsehoods. She was suffering nevertheless almost as much as in her childish days, when the flesh had paid for such wrong-doing at Miss Ardern's hands. Her sensitive soul shrank before the lash of conscience with scarcely less agony. She could remember Agnes Ardern saying to her in a kind patient voice that yet held something of sternness: "You know I hate punishing you, Olave. But you must learn to speak the truth fearlessly at all times." And although it had happened at least eight years ago, something of the shame and abasement she had felt then was present

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with her to-day. She was no longer able to speak the truth fearlessly.

Felicity was both annoyed and mystified by the affair of the letters. She was almost afraid to make inquiries lest she should discover that Olave had really been deceiving her. The finding of the glove had been the first thing to give actual form to her fears. It seemed to suggest that Olave had recently visited the Knoll, and the cigarette ends, so carelessly observed by Alick Clibborn, had pointed to the fact that she had not gone there alone. But on carefully considering the matter Felicity came to the conclusion that if any mystery existed it would be better for her to know the truth, however disagreeable it might prove. She therefore sent telegrams to both Mrs. Smith and Agnes Ardern inquiring if they had received letters from her of that particular date. Mrs. Smith wired back immediately to say that no letter had been received. Agnes' reply took longer; there were floods in France and evidently she had waited a day or two to make sure that her sister's missive had really miscarried. But on the following Tuesday, just four days after Alick Clibborn's visit, Agnes' answer, also in the negative, arrived at Cheldon. Felicity, now thoroughly disturbed and anxious, took the two telegrams in her hand and went up to Olave's room.

Olave was not, however, there, and Felicity, remembering that she had asked permission to go for a walk directly after luncheon, concluded that she must have already set forth. Perhaps it would be possible to overtake her if she started at once. Her eagerness to obtain some explanation of the mystery from Olave made Lady Trent suddenly energetic. She went to her room and put on a close-fitting fur toque and a coat with a high fur collar which came up closely round her throat. It was very cold, and a

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high, boisterous wind was blowing keenly. When she started forth she had no very definite plan in her head; she did not know exactly where she was going nor what she intended to do, except that she must find Olave as quickly as possible and try to learn the truth from her.

As she passed down the frozen paths of the lower garden that led into the park, she heard two people talking on the other side of the hedge. She recognized them as two men from the village who came to give help in the garden sometimes.

"I tell yer," said one of them, "that my Jim zeed 'er acomin' out o' the Knoll and it wur nearly dark and a wildish night. Now I don't call that right conduck, and ef 'twur one of my own gals she'd get a proper taäste of the stick, she would." And he laughed a little grimly.

Felicity was feeling so acutely anxious that the chance words served to deepen her own suspense. Who had been seen thus emerging from the Knoll in the dusk of a wildish night? There were two occasions during the past week when Olave had come home late, looking flushed and excited. For a moment she stopped short, then she turned down another path that led directly to the stile at the foot of the hill. She knew now that she was on her way as rapidly as possible to Ardern's Knoll. And she believed quite firmly that she would find Olave there. And who was with her? Was it likely that she would go there disobediently, day after day, to stay there quite alone until it was nearly dark? Felicity thought of the little grey glove she had discovered when she went up to the Knoll with Alick Clibborn.

It came into her mind that ever since she had started forth that day Ardern's Knoll had subconsciously been her objective, even before she had heard those words of sinister import.

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But, of course, they did not and could not refer to Olave! The man had probably seen one of the girls from the village coming out of Ardern's Knoll. Perhaps it was Harriet Grey, a bold forward minx with none too good a character, and no parents to keep an eye upon her. Agnes had once or twice spoken sorrowfully to Felicity about Harriet, her unavailing efforts to help her and of the girl's curious obstinacy in evil doing. Yes, the man must certainly have been speaking of Harriet. Nevertheless, Felicity was not able wholly to convince herself on this point, and she quickened her steps and reached the stile in a very short space of time.

The afternoon was fine and clear, and the Knoll stood out in darkish tones of purple and brown against a colorless, windy sky. There was an odor of newly-ploughed earth, and the long narrow valley of the Chell glimmered green in the winter sunshine.

Felicity climbed the hill and walked along the path into the wood. She had an increased belief now that she should find Olave there, perhaps in the grassy space where she had sat talking to Alick Clibborn a few days ago, and which held for her the bitter-sweet memories of her own early love-affair. But it never entered her head that she would find Quinn there. She had never imagined that he would dare to return to the neighborhood while she and Olave were at the Manor House.

Lady Trent always moved softly. She had not the remotest intention of concealing her presence from anyone who might be in the wood. But when she came within sight of the open space, while she was still some little distance away, she saw something that transfixed her to the spot and brought a look of dismay to her eyes.

Quinn and Olave were sitting together on the fallen tree-trunk. His arm encircled the girl and her

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head was leaning against his shoulder, in a languorous, drooping attitude, as of some one spent with fatigue or perhaps emotion. They looked as if they had been sitting thus for a long time. Alick Clibborn's words flashed back to her mind. "She lacks your frankness of disposition—that's a pity, to my thinking, in such a young girl." So his old discernment had not failed. That lack of frankness, to give it no harsher name, was visibly written in Olave's face for penetrating, critical eyes to see.

As she watched she saw Guy bend his head very slightly till his lips touched Olave's. Neither of them had been disturbed by Lady Trent's footsteps. She drew back a little into the shadow of the trees wondering what she ought to do.

Quinn's finely-drawn profile, thinner than she remembered it, was just visible to her. His hat was pushed back disclosing his thick, ruffled, fair hair. From Quinn she looked toward Olave. But her daughter's face was almost entirely hidden from her; she could see little beyond the patch of dark hair outlined against the grey, tweed coat that Guy was wearing.

Felicity turned away and stole down the path unperceived. She moved now with deliberate care; she did not wish them to hear her footsteps or to know that she was there. Although Olave was her own child she could not summon up courage to confront her. She felt anew the immensity, the darkness, of the gulf that divided them. She was conscious only of one imperative desire, and that was to take Olave away, somewhere where she could never see Quinn again.

For Olave, aided and abetted by Quinn, had completely outwitted her. Day after day she must have spent her free time alone with him in this manner. And but for those lost letters, the trivial incident

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of the glove, Felicity knew that she might never have discovered the truth; her suspicions might never have been definitely aroused.

All the way home her mind was subconsciously weaving plans for the immediate future. That her daughter's name should already have been the subject of idle village talk filled her with renewed shame and dismay. Yes, it was most certainly Olave of whom the man had spoken with such grim disapprobation. But Felicity was at present too angry with Guy to be angry with Olave. She did not yet think of Olave except as a victim. It was possible, however, that when Olave next uttered one of her calm, deliberate falsehoods she might feel very angry with her. She would show her how useless those deceptions had suddenly become. Oh, if she could only speak to her as a mother ought to be able to speak to her daughter without this terrible fear of estranging her altogether! But she had come too late into her life to do this. They should have been, as Clibborn had said, more like two sisters than like mother and daughter. Yet instead of that there was none of the close intimacy which commonly characterizes the relationship of mother and daughter, between herself and Olave. Other mothers could reprove and punish fearlessly, knowing that by so doing they would forfeit nothing of their child's love. These reflections scourged Felicity's heart to a new intense pain. Always, always her anger fell back upon herself; the blame was all hers.

When she reached the Manor her first action was to telephone to Clibborn begging him to come over at once. The trivial exertion was good for Felicity, and the sound of his deep, incisive voice, replying in the slightly exaggerated way always induced by the telephone, gave her a sense of courage. Clibborn would surely help her. She meant to tell him the whole truth when he came.

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He promised to arrive in about an hour and hoped not to be there later than five o'clock. Secretly he was a little puzzled by the fact that Lady Trent should send for him again so soon. Something startling must have happened since his last visit. But he asked no questions and his loud, yet oddly muffled, telephone-voice betrayed no surprise.

Felicity went up to her sitting-room and sat down exhausted by the fire. She wondered again if she ought to have crept away like that, almost like a thief, refraining from making her presence known. She would ask Alick Clibborn what he thought. Probably he would blame her, for he was intensely frank and open and straight in his own conduct. But she had not felt quite sure of herself, of her own self-control. She had been conscious of a fierce and violent anger against Quinn, an anger that had flamed into active hatred, the deeper because she had once loved him. She could not understand that love of hers now. He was her enemy—the bitterest she had in the world. He had come like a thief in the night, to steal Olave's heart. That he should have dared to return to the neighborhood after all that had passed and resume the intrigue and compromise Olave's good name in this way, were things that were quite beyond her comprehension. Perhaps he had devised this course of conduct as a subtle punishment for her own rupture with him. But whatever happened Olave must be saved from him at all costs.

Agnes had not succeeded in separating them. She herself had failed just as Agnes had done. She longed for Alick's help, as well as for the man's strength and power and clear vision. His devotion to herself, unchanged across many years, touched her deeply. She began to see its rare worth.

How long had Olave been thus deceiving her? How long had she been meeting Guy in the deserted

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Knoll? How long had he been renewing those lessons of love, teaching her to love him, holding her in his arms, kissing her? No, she could not blame Olave too much. She was young and ignorant, and she possessed the terrible, immovable obstinacy that had characterized Digby Trent. And Lady Trent knew how powerfully Guy could attract and fascinate when he chose. She, woman of the world, experienced and aware, had swiftly succumbed to that charm. She could hardly, therefore, blame Olave. But it was all over now. She should never see him again. Even, if it involved shutting up the Manor House and joining Agnes in Florence; the task must still be achieved.

Moved by a sudden impulse Felicity took up that last new book of Guy's, and tearing out the pages by the handful she flung them upon the fire. The paper was rather strong and thick and the flames did not consume it very easily. The empty binding with the gilt lettering lay charred in the grate. It was still lying there when Olave returned from her walk.

Felicity heard her come upstairs and go along the hall to her room. She longed to give her another chance of confession before Clibborn came. She went to the door and called her·

"Olave! Olave!"

"Yes, mother." Olave appeared in the doorway. She looked as she had done so often of late, flushed, radiant, and excited as if at the thought of some delicious secret happiness. Felicity regarded her with a calmness that betrayed nothing. But she felt a pang of grief for the pain she would so soon have to inflict upon Olave. She must destroy the source of all that bright radiance. It was absolutely necessary, and she must do it just as a mother has sometimes to consent to her child's undergoing some painful, perilous surgical operation in order to effect its cure.

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When she was young, hardly older than Olave, no one had dared to inflict the necessary pain upon her and save her from Digby Trent. There was something alike and yet very different in the two cases. But because no one had had the courage to step in and interfere, even at the cost of hurting her, Felicity had had to suffer very cruelly. In a sense her life had been spoiled and Olave, too, had suffered indirectly from her mother's unhappiness. Felicity was the least morbid of women, but in looking back upon that time she knew that she had been called upon to experience bitter things such as few girls of eighteen are called upon to bear. This made her all the more resolute to step in and interfere with Olave. She should never be permitted to marry a man of known unworthiness. Once, it is true, he had told Felicity that he intended to become worthy of her, but obviously he had never fulfilled this intention. Had he done so he would have come honorably and openly to Cheldon, if indeed, he had ever come at all.

Olave came into the room, and the first thing she saw was the red cover of Guy's book lying charred on the hearth. There was an odor as of something burning in the room. She saw the little heaps of printed paper with the edges blackened and smouldering. And above all she caught a glimpse of the gilt letters. The words *Guy Quinn* were still legible. She believed that her mother, having finished the book, had burned it to prevent her from reading it. But it hurt Olave nevertheless to see anything of Guy's wantonly destroyed.

Her mother's voice interrupted these reflections.

"Did you have a nice walk, Olave?"

"Yes, thank you, mother."

"I hope you didn't go beyond the park."

"No, mother."

"You know I don't care for you to go even into our own woods alone?"

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"Yes, mother."

"Oh, by the way, Mr. Clibborn is coming this evening. I think he will be here at tea-time. I want to talk to him, Olave, so you can have your tea in the schoolroom. I shall send for you later."

Everything that was unusual just then gave Olave a sense of unaccountable anxiety, proceeding, as she believed, from a dread that her own guilt might have been discovered. She wondered why Clibborn was to return that evening. He was an old friend, but it was only four days since he had lunched with them, and nothing had been said then about his speedy return. Had Lady Trent sent for him? Olave looked at her mother with a sharp, anxious scrutiny. Felicity watched the effect upon her daughter of the little announcement; and she was able to wonder at and even admire Olave's self-control. There was only that slight betrayal of anxiety, nothing more.

"Why is he coming back so soon?" Olave asked at last, as if unable to restrain her curiosity.

"I think you must be content with the bare knowledge that he is coming," said Felicity, in a light, cutting tone. "We are not much accustomed to giving each other detailed explanations, are we?"

The two faces so strangely alike in feature and coloring and now also in their striking pallor, confronted each other like those of two duelists, engaged in measuring each other before the final supreme contest. Felicity seemed to herself to be fighting with, as well as against, Olave, in a desperate, prolonged struggle to save her from a terrible threatened fate.

From her mother's face, pale, determined, resolute, Olave's eyes traveled slowly round the room and fastened themselves once more upon the heap of charred paper in the grate. The sight of Guy's burnt

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book seemed to acquire a deeper, more sinister, significance. What did it all mean? Had her mother been making discoveries? Olave looked again almost appealingly at Lady Trent, but she could read nothing in her face that gave any clue to the answers to these questions.

To hide her anxiety was so essential a measure at this moment that Olave brought all the power of her strong, obstinate will to bear upon it. If her mother knew or guessed anything she herself would not contribute gratuitously to such knowledge. But the tension was too great to be borne for long and Olave turned and moved toward the door with slow footsteps. Felicity watched her almost wistfully as she went out of the room.

Lady Trent made a last effort.

"Olave!" she said, raising her voice a little.

Olave came back and stood in the doorway.

"Yes, mother?"

"Those two letters I gave you to post last week never arrived. I had a telegram from Aggie to say that hers hadn't reached her."

The air seemed to be suddenly filled with confused, curious sounds in the midst of which Olave could hear her own voice saying:

"They must have been lost in the mail."

Her voice was dry and a little harsh. Then, as her mother said nothing, she added:

"Letters do get lost."

"Of course they do," said Felicity briskly. "Still it was odd that both these should have gone astray. Just the ones I asked you to post for me."

Olave went out of the room, closing the door softly.

It was almost dark now and the cold grey dusk of the winter afternoon was spreading like soft somber wings over the Cotswold landscape. Felicity went

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to the window and looked out. Through the increasing obscurity she could see Ardern's Knoll emerging with a dark and almost sinister significance. It was as if some ancient tragedy connected with the passing of that chief, long dead, was still able to impregnate the spot with an aura that nothing could destroy. It was a haunt of formless ghosts, dominated by a savage spirit of place, mysterious, enchanted, as if held in fee by magic presences which although invisible were powerfully hostile toward those human beings who carelessly invaded its precincts. That afternoon Felicity had felt a kind of superstitious fear about entering the little wood even before she had come upon the object of her search. It was that very dread of indeterminate perils that had made her reluctant to go there with Alick Clibborn. She, too, though perhaps in a lesser degree than Olave herself, had been sensitive and impressionable as regards that peculiar, cold atmosphere that made the little wood seem like the abode of those fierce, implacable, mythical beings that haunted the trees and streams in pagan lore.

Even now she was able to pity Olave. She could see in those foolish, childish falsehoods the influence of Guy Quinn. He had this child utterly in his power; she was a mere puppet in his hands, a pawn that moved as he chose to make her. And Olave had shown no least sign of shame. Even now when she had been confronted with the knowledge of the lost letters, her self-control had not deserted her. Looking back upon her demeanor Lady Trent could see in it something that was exultant, even triumphant, almost insolent in its arrogance. She was proud of her conquest, and she showed it in her movements, her speech, in the erect carriage of her head, the fearless shining of her eyes. All women carrying a love-affair to a successful conclusion wear

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something of this mien. Olave had the assurance of a much older woman. The affair had brought out all her latent subtlety, all her resource, the primitive cunning of the cave-woman. She had used them all unscrupulously. Had she fallen a prey—even as her mother had done—to the influence of those enchanted woods?

CHAPTER XXVIII

CLIBBORN GIVES ADVICE

WHEN Alick Clibborn came into the Library about five o'clock that afternoon he found Felicity waiting for him.

To his eyes so long accustomed to the glaring suns, the ceaseless summer of southern India, he thought the room looked deliciously cosy, as perhaps only an English room can look on a winter's evening. On the wide, ample hearth a great fire made of coal and hard, solid, ancient logs was generously piled. Sometimes the logs spat out little hissing, blue flames. The heart of the fire was a bright, glowing, orange-red. It cast warm reflections over the room, deepening the red of the thick, heavy curtains and striking here and there something fashioned of silver or brass that was half hidden in the shadows, so that it leaped into sudden, rosy life.

And Felicity, the woman of his dreams, was sitting there waiting for him. He was too little sanguine to imagine that she had sent for him with this abrupt urgency, merely to give him an affirmative answer. Yet, this time he who had so long been without hope did not feel hopeless. He had an idea they would draw nearer together over that child of

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hers. He had divined that all was not going well and smoothly between her and Olave.

His first question, as he glanced round the room in order to ascertain that they were alone, referred to her.

"Where's Olave?" he asked.

Felicity wore a white dress of some thick, woolen material. A white fur wrap covered her shoulders. Clibborn thought he had never seen her look more beautiful, even, "when all the wild summer was in her gaze."

"She's having her tea upstairs. She'll come down presently, when I send for her. It's about Olave I wish to speak to you."

"About Olave," he repeated, and despite a feeling of slight disappointment he was able to assure himself that, somehow, he had always known it.

He stretched out his fine, long hands, to the flames.

"Have you been making discoveries, my dear Felicity?" he inquired.

"Yes. I didn't like to tell you before, it didn't seem fair, about one's own daughter. But perhaps you can advise me."

There was a long pause in which Clibborn waited for her to speak. Felicity sat there still and motionless, looking into the fire as if she saw pictures there, beautiful, tormenting pictures. In reality that scene in the Knoll was in the forefront of her thoughts almost to the exclusion of any other. She saw Olave's face lying against Guy's sleeve, listless and curiously quiescent as if spent and exhausted with emotion, but deeply almost somnolently content, and the man bending over it, touching her lips from time to time with his own, kissing, too, the white space of forehead just below the dark, thick fold of hair. Day after day she felt certain that this same scene had been enacted, without scruple on Guy's part, without remonstrance on Olave's.

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Yet she could always see in Olave the girl she had herself been eighteen years ago, young, ardent, eager, deeply in love, impatient of restraint and opposition. But she knew that she had been more frank and fearless and less deceitful than Olave. She could not remember that she had ever uttered a deliberate lie to her father or to Agnes.

From Digby Olave had inherited a blind fixity of purpose and a determination that could be unscrupulous. All his will had been brought to the attainment of a desired end or object, but with attainment his interest in it had commonly vanished. Felicity had not forgotten the unflattering rapidity with which after marriage he had ceased to care for her. Would it have been thus with Olave if she had been permitted to pursue her course to the end, had married Quinn, only to discover the clay feet of her idol? No, she should never be allowed to learn whether this young love of hers were built upon the rock or upon the shifting sands.

She began slowly to tell the whole story to Clibborn. He listened attentively, thoughtfully, as if weighing each word as she uttered it. She knew by his strangely, impassive face that he would view the case with a complete detached impartiality. No predilection for herself would militate against the perfect fairness of his judgment. He would not unduly blame Olave, nor would he give way to the greater temptation of unduly blaming Quinn. Felicity told the story in as few words as possible. Clibborn learned for the first time why she had abruptly severed her engagement to Quinn. There was a pause when Felicity had at length finished the dreary little recital.

Clibborn was the first to break the silence.

"Do you suppose he wants to marry her?" he said.

"He told me once that he loved her. That was when I broke off my own engagement to him. I—I

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suspected something of the kind. You see, he had only just got to know for certain that Olave was my daughter, he didn't even suspect it till some time after he first saw her. And she learned the truth by meeting him one day in Waverton Street."

"Dear Felicity, what a horrible little story," said Clibborn.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Lady Trent. "And now it has become too difficult for me to cope with it alone. Will you tell me what I ought to do?"

She looked at him earnestly as if appealing to him for assistance.

"Oh, I should take her away at once, if I were you. Quite away, out of the country somewhere. Strong, brutal measures are the best in these cases. Olave's too young and the man doesn't seem quite straight. What a pity, for he's very clever and brilliant and I've been told he can be charming when he chooses."

"I could take Olave to Florence. Aggie's there now, you know. I don't much care for the idea—I know so many people there—but we could make it our headquarters and travel about. Olave's never seen Italy."

"There's no place quite so healing. I should take her there by all means. But, Felicity, do forgive my asking you one question. Haven't you any kind of hold over your daughter at all?"

"Why, what sort of hold? I can refuse to give her any money. I never do give her much, as she has everything she can possibly need."

"No, I don't mean money. I mean any kind of spiritual hold. Is she quite a little pagan with no knowledge of right and wrong?"

"Oh, no. Agnes was very careful to bring her up religiously. She used always to go to church with my sister on Sundays, sometimes even twice. And

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she was confirmed about two years ago. Agnes wrote and told me she was very careful about her conduct for a long time, both before and after the ceremony."

"And now the effects have worn off," observed Clibborn thoughtfully. "Yet she's very young—isn't she Felicity?—to have flung everything aside in this way. She oughtn't, if you'll forgive my saying so, to have been allowed to stray so far without let or hindrance."

And his face suddenly became serious and stern.

"You are blaming me, you have every right to do so," said Lady Trent with a touch of bitterness. "Yet I have had very little to do with her bringing up. I can't blame Aggie either, I know she fulfilled her trust admirably. The truth is, I have come too late into Olave's life to have any influence over her now. She regards me as a stranger and it is only natural that she should. And there is another thing. She has always shown herself reluctant to go to church at all ever since she knew Quinn. It is because he is a Catholic and once she told me she wished to become one. It was odd, too, the reason she gave me. She said she felt that it would help her to be good. It has certainly not helped Guy to be scrupulous and honorable."

"That is because he is not a practising Catholic," said Clibborn. "I know that much about him. If he were he would not lead that poor child into such a maze of perfidy and deception. And so you didn't like the thought of her becoming one?"

"Naturally I didn't. I am not a particularly religious woman—like Agnes for example—but I should dislike my daughter to profess a different belief from mine. I told her it would be impossible."

She spoke with a certain decision that until now had been curiously absent from her manner. His

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answer astonished her, and made her feel for the first time that he was being less sympathetic with her own point of view than she had hoped to find him.

"I think you were wrong there," he said. "Don't you think she might have felt the odiousness of her conduct and was perhaps straining after some spiritual prop—something tangible and effective that would give her practical help? The Catholic Church does that, you know. I speak as an outsider, but I have on several occasions observed its influence upon persons who belonged to it, under circumstances of curious or unusual temptation. And I can imagine that to anyone conscious of weakness, there would be something specially attractive in a religion that gives very definite rules for the guidance of conduct and very definite spiritual reasons why those rules should be obeyed."

These words had a slightly irritating effect upon Lady Trent. She had never looked at this purely spiritual side of the matter. She had seen Olave erring against social conventions, exhibiting a deficiency of those qualities of uprightness, of straight-forwardness, of truth and honor, which are commonly held to be the fruits of education, good-breeding, and an ancient tradition. It was because Olave had failed in these things that Felicity blamed her. But she had never regarded the matter from the angle now offered by Clibborn for her contemplation. She had not felt or betrayed any anxiety as to the very soul of her daughter. She had not envisaged remote spiritual perils nor tried to discover how best they could be averted. She said hastily:

"But—don't you see?—her becoming a Catholic would only bring her nearer to Guy, take her further from me. He may not be a good Catholic, I am perfectly certain indeed that he's a very bad one, yet, I know from experience that he would refuse to be married in any Church but his own. He isn't pre-

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pared to sever all connection with it. He has not lost all respect, all feeling for his religion. If Olave were a Catholic it would only enhance her worth a thousand times in his eyes. I should never be able to keep them apart. I should put a strong weapon into her hand to be used against me."

"I am not thinking of you at this moment, I am thinking of Olave. You are not in any danger, thank God, my dear Felicity, and she is. And this is the only thing that seems likely to be of permanent help to her." Clibborn's voice was very grave. "I have seen cases when the very fact of becoming a Catholic has produced in a man so complete and arresting a change that I could not deny it, try as I would to minimize it or to account for it on human grounds. A change of character and outlook quite beyond all imagining. One could not call it anything else but a new birth. You have tried other means and failed. You are watching Olave now drifting rudderless when she is only seventeen, and yet you refuse to give her the one thing that could help her in this very unusual and tragic crisis—the aid of a sound dogmatic religion that has been of inestimable spiritual assistance to millions of men for nearly two thousand years."

"I really wonder you do not become a Catholic yourself," she said. And, although she spoke with a touch of disdain, she was aware that he was very much in earnest and that he was actuated by a strong wish to help both herself and Olave. Nevertheless, she thought he was allowing his natural breadth of vision to carry him too far. If this thing, which he suggested and even urged, were done it would surely divide her more arbitrarily than ever from Olave. They would have no meeting place at all. Their separation would be permanent, irrevocable.

"What you suggest," she continued, "would be quite impracticable especially for such a young girl.

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I am quite sure Olave knows very little about the Catholic religion, unless Guy has taught her anything, which I think unlikely. She would be the first to rebel against the very strenuous discipline which the Catholic Church imposes. She is naturally disobedient and wilful. Besides I feel that I am capable of enforcing submission without that. I am going to teach Olave that she can't defy me. When we are living quietly in Florence I hope to regain some influence over her. I mean to do for her what my father and Agnes ought to have done for me more than eighteen years ago."

Her face seen thus in the firelight had acquired a certain sternness of purpose.

"Then you must take her abroad without delay. It's really the only thing to be done if the other step doesn't commend itself to you. But I still think you're making a mistake, Felicity. You are relying too much upon human effort. I shouldn't give her a chance of seeing or communicating with Quinn before she goes. And when you get to Italy explain everything to her quite frankly. Put your cards on the table. Try to get her to see that she mustn't have her own way, for her own sake and because so much depends upon her making a wise, good marriage when the time comes."

"Yes," said Felicity, more submissively. She could understand and appreciate sound, worldly advice such as Clibborn had just given her. She had never been taught to regard life from a supernatural standpoint, to relegate all its happenings to a rarefied, spiritual plane. Nevertheless, she was impressed by the fact that Clibborn did not seem to place great confidence in merely temporal methods of procedure. They could be tried of course, but he did not seem to have the same clear, unquestioning belief in their ultimate success. She had never regarded him as a very deeply religious man. He must have fallen under

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new influences. Those cases he had mentioned, likening them with what seemed to her an almost fantastic extravagance to a new birth, a positive regeneration, had no doubt produced a profound impression upon him, and had taught him to appreciate spiritual motives as at once the highest and the most powerful in their sway.

But she was not going to try such an experiment as that upon Olave.

"I'll send for Olave now. I think she's a little suspicious."

She rang the bell and gave the order for Olave to be told she was to come down to the library. Olave obeyed as promptly as possible. She was a little afraid of Clibborn, of his undoubted influence over her mother.

He rose as she came into the room. Like her mother she was dressed in white. Over her dress she wore a knitted coat of ivory-colored silk. It set off the delicate magnolia whiteness of her clear, flawless complexion. The likeness to her mother to-day was extraordinarily accentuated. But he could not bring himself to believe that Felicity was the less lovely of the two.

"Well, Olave?" he said, holding out his hand and looking down upon her from his great height with hard, keen penetrating eyes.

She wondered afresh why he had returned to the Manor this afternoon; her unquiet conscience suggested a thousand uncomfortable reasons connected with herself for his presence here now.

Felicity said quietly:

"I have been talking things over with Mr. Clibborn. He agrees with me that it would be an excellent plan for us to go out and join Aggie in Florence. I had no idea the winter at Cheldon would prove so —so trying."

"Have you settled this quite suddenly?" said

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Olave. Her throat seemed to close upon the words.

"Oh, you know, I never make plans long beforehand," said Lady Trent, with a kind of studied carelessness.

Olave felt almost sick with nervousness and suspense.

"Do you mean to go soon?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, we shall start immediately. To-morrow, perhaps."

So there was to be no reprieve. They would take her away, helpless pawn that she was. She would never be allowed to see Guy.

Clibborn, watching the resolute self-control of her young face, began to feel sorry for her. She was like a brilliant butterfly impaled and wriggling upon a pin and rendered savage by the pain.

"You'll enjoy Florence enormously," he told her. "It's a charming place." He turned to Lady Trent. "Where is Miss Ardern staying?"

"She's taken a small furnished villa on one of the hills. Aggie always likes being in the country best. It's two miles from Florence."

"Ah, that will be charming in the spring," said Clibborn, "and it'll very soon be spring in Florence."

"Shall we stay abroad a long time?" asked Olave tonelessly.

Her face was white and almost mask-like. She saw the vision of her own happiness slipping into the obscure dark mists of the future, the unknown tremendous future. And to-morrow Guy had intended to go to London to make definite plans for the wedding. It was to have been very soon. Now it might never take place at all. They were going to separate her from Guy. It was to decide her fate that Mr. Clibborn had come that evening. He had turned down his thumbs in the manner of the cruel Roman ladies of old. But why—why? What did they know? What had they found out?

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"That depends upon circumstances, my dear Olave." Felicity's voice was very quiet. "I shall stay as long as I think necessary."

Olave felt all at once very young and powerless and helpless. She had too a sense of imprisonment, like a young wild animal may feel when first shut into a cage by its fierce and relentless captors. And, like a wild animal before its heart is broken into outward submission, she felt almost maddened by the knowledge of her own inability to break those restraining bars. An impulse to fling herself at Lady Trent's feet and make a full confession of everything and implore her forgiveness did once pass through her mind. But she quickly rejected it. She must go on playing her part a little longer until it was useless to play it any more. Perhaps she would make an attempt to see Guy in London before they left. She must by hook or by crook get a letter to him tonight. He would be able to think of some plan, to suggest some counter-move.

That sudden, unbidden thought of Guy threatened to destroy her careful controlled composure. She felt a sudden access of insensate hatred against Clibborn. What right had he to come here and coolly suggest that they should go abroad? What right had anyone to come between her and the man she was determined to marry? She flashed a glance of anger at Clibborn who, however, did not observe it. Even now he intensely disliked the kind of fencing that was going on between mother and daughter. He considered that long ago Felicity should have had a frank explanation with Olave. It was true that Lady Trent had only just learned the truth, but she must have been aware for a long time past that things were not going well, and she had even been rendered unhappy by formless suspicions that could easily have been cleared up by a little frankness on both sides.

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"No, don't go away, dear," said Lady Trent, as Olave made a movement as if she were going to leave the room.

"I ought to be off," said Clibborn glancing at the clock. "Well, perhaps we shall meet in London before you start. If I can be of any use in arranging your journey, please let me know."

"We shall be starting very soon," said Lady Trent smiling. "You know my mania for sudden journeys."

"I'm a restless spirit myself," he rejoined. "And you, Olave, do you like traveling?"

"I have never been abroad. But I have always hated going away from Cheldon!" she said, with a touch of passion she could not repress.

"Florence will change all that. You'll want to go back there every year when May comes around."

"Then why can't we wait till May?"

"Because your mother likes sudden journeys," he answered gravely.

And again he felt a deep pity for Olave. Were they so sure, after all, that they were right in thus playing the part of an arbitrary providence to this young girl? Would she be grateful to them in after years for stepping in and carrying her away? He glanced from mother to daughter. He was so sorry for them both.

CHAPTER XXIX

PREPARATIONS FOR A JOURNEY

OLAVE'S brain, made unduly active by the urgency of the situation, was already planning, even while Clibborn was still speaking, a scheme for communicating with Guy. At first it was difficult to

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imagine anything that was not foredoomed to failure. Felicity's suspicions were certainly confirmed; she had come to a definite knowledge of at least part of the truth. Cheldon Park was a long way off—to Olave its distance seemed almost insurmountable. And which of the servants would risk Lady Trent's displeasure by carrying thither a note to Guy that evening?

Yet it must be done.

Then she suddenly remembered with an illumination that seemed almost like an inspiration that Luke, the under gardener, who had always been her humble slave, was sent every evening at six o'clock to the village to take the letters for the evening mail. She would give him a note for Guy; his fidelity should be rewarded with a sum of money.

She went up to the schoolroom and scribbled a note to Guy. Then she cautiously opened the window and waited. It was already nearly six, and Luke would soon be passing along the little garden path on his journey to the kitchen. The window was at the side of the house and could not be seen from any other. When Luke passed she would lean out and call to him. Then she would go downstairs and meet him in the servants' passage.

His clumsy, heavy tread was audible at last in the clear, frosty silence of the winter's night. Luke never hurried; he was slow-moving, slow-witted but as far as Olave knew absolutely dependable. She felt no shame at the prospect of bribing a servant to take a letter for her; the urgency of her need rendered the action of paramount necessity. She leaned out of the window, which was not more than a dozen feet from the ground, and called softly:

"Luke! Luke!"

He stopped short to locate the sound. But the light from the window did not leave him long in

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doubt. Against the obscurity he could see the pallid oval of Olave's face bending down toward him.

"Yes, miss?"

"Wait for me just by the door. I've got an errand for you to do," said Olave.

"Yes, miss," said Luke.

In a few minutes she was standing in the shadows of the doorway that opened into the servants' passage. The night air touched her like a cool, reviving caress.

"Luke, will you promise to do something for me? Take this letter to Cheldon Park to-night and give it to the servant, but don't say where it came from. Ask that it may be given to Mr. Quinn *at once*, he is staying there. It's most important that he should receive it to-night."

"Cheldon Park be a long way off, miss," said Luke reluctantly. Baynes was a severe taskmaster and he had been working very hard all day. He did not relish the idea of having his evening leisure curtailed, nor of foregoing the happy, jovial half-hour he was accustomed to spend at the *Ardern Arms* when the letters were duly posted.

"Oh, Luke, please, do! It's simply fearfully important. And here's something for yourself."

Luke's sharp little eyes caught the glint of gold. Sovereigns did not often come in his way, and much of his wages had to be handed over to his mother for his board and keep. There were ill moments for the boy when the stipulated sum was not forthcoming on Saturday nights, and his father had unpleasant methods of meeting such defalcations. This sum, timidly offered by Miss Olave for a little extra exertion, would procure him many happy satisfying hours at the Ardern Arms.

Luke's reluctance vanished.

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"Thank'ee kindly, miss. I'll be zurrtain zure to take un." He grabbed at his rusty forelock.

"Thank you, oh, thank you, Luke!"

Olave vanished up the stairs as swiftly and silently as she had come.

"Wull I never! Queer goin's on," murmured Luke as, letter and sovereign carefully stowed away in his pocket, he betook himself to the kitchen.

All that evening Olave waited for her mother to speak. They sat together after dinner in the library until it was time to go to bed, in what seemed to the girl an uneasy silence. Nothing but speech was wanting now, since Olave knew that her mother knew. But Felicity required no confession; she held the situation firmly in her own hands. She saw no necessity for speech, at least not yet. Olave would surely understand by the plans that had been made for this sudden journey abroad that Felicity had, by some unexplained means, arrived at the truth and was engaged in circumventing her daughter. The falsehoods, so glibly uttered, the petty deceptions, the little degrading subterfuges had alike been of no avail. And Olave was to be punished in the only way that could really hurt her. She was to be taken away from Cheldon out of the reach of Guy Quinn. Her mother had this terrible power and authority over her that she could take her where she chose. Unless—

Unless Guy stepped in and with a bold countermove bore her off to a place of safety till the hurried preparations for their marriage could be completed. She thrilled at the thought that even now Luke, slowest and most deliberate of pedestrians, must at last be approaching Cheldon Park. Very soon Guy would be aware that prompt action on his part would be necessary. Olave had immense confidence even now that he would be able to intervene.

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She was hopeful until she looked across the room to where her mother was sitting at a table writing letters. Her face, seen thus in profile, was delicately cut and hard as a cameo. The very movement with which she forced the pen to travel rapidly from side to side of the paper suggested determination and swiftness. How could Olave hope to circumvent these two experienced, powerful people—her mother and Clibborn?

"May I go to bed now, mother?"

The clock had just struck ten, and the silence, except for the nimble scratching of Felicity's pen, was becoming unbearable.

"Not yet. I shall be coming myself in a few minutes."

Presently she folded her letters, glanced at the envelopes and affixed the stamps by moistening them with a little sponge fastened to a gold handle. Then she rose.

"Come, Olave," she said.

They went upstairs. In the hall Olave paused before the door of her own room. She touched the handle and realized that the door was locked. She became aware that Felicity was watching her with eyes that were hard and bright.

"Yes—I have had a bed made up in my dressing-room for you to-night. I wish you to sleep there."

She spoke coldly, carelessly. Did she imagine that Olave would steal out in the early morning to try to obtain a last interview with Quinn?

"But why—why?" said Olave wildly. "I mean—I want to sleep in my own room."

"I'm afraid you must do as I wish," said Lady Trent.

At that moment Olave was forced into an unwilling but almost passionate admiration for her mother, for her air of authority that compelled submission,

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even her very beauty that was so vivid and wonderful a thing.

She followed her, cowed, submissive. The dressing-room was a small apartment just beyond Felicity's bedroom and between the two there was a communicating door. There was no other mode of egress. As she entered it Olave felt the bars of the cage.

"I can't sleep here! I can't—it's cruel to make me!" She was almost hysterical.

All the time she knew her little mutiny was utterly futile.

"My dear child, don't make a scene. Go to bed quietly. Do you think I am going to trust you any more?"

There was a dangerous light in Felicity's eyes. For the first time in her life perhaps, she was exerting her authority as Olave's mother.

Olave was frightened into silence. She was afraid of her mother in this mood. There was such resolution in her tone. So she knew—there was no longer any doubt of that. She had coldly planned the change.

"Olave," said Lady Trent, "I may as well tell you that you have lied to me I hope for the last time. I am not going to reproach you, though I could say many things to you. Good-night."

She stooped and kissed her forehead.

Then she went out of the room and closed the communicating door. Olave heard the key grate in the lock.

Without any pretence of concealment she had made her daughter's egress an impossibility. This little action with its demonstration of authority, of superior power, was full of significance to Olave. She was to be guarded closely as a prisoner. She was to have no chance of communicating with Guy. Her one comfort was to feel that by this time her

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letter must be safely in his possession. He would know that she had gone to London; he would certainly follow her. While she was at Waverton Street he would surely contrive to write to her.

Olave undressed quickly and switching off the light crept into bed. The room was not quite dark, for a fire was burning in the grate and cast a warm, generous glow upon the pale walls and the dark old prints that decorated them. Olave could hear her mother's quiet subdued movements in the next room. She could hear her conversing in a low tone to Hortense. Perhaps she was giving further directions about the packing that had to be done. There was always a great deal to arrange just before a journey. And she had Olave to think of this time as well as herself.

Olave's tears flowed unchecked the moment she laid her head on the pillow. She tried to restrain them, but she was in that highly nervous, excitable mood when to cry seems the most simple and natural thing to do. She buried her face in the pillow and wept unrestrainedly, almost as if her heart would break. Lady Trent fancied she could hear from time to time the sound of a stifled, smothered sob. Had she been too hard? She longed to go in and console Olave, to take her in her arms and press her closely to her heart, and whisper words of love and pity. But it was impossible. The remembrance of Olave's set, stony, little face slew the idea directly it was formed.

But so also would Felicity Ardern have wept eighteen years ago had anyone stepped in to separate her from Digby Trent.

Early on the following morning Olave crept out of bed and went to the window. All the landscape was illuminated with the cold and pure light of the winter dawn. The sky was clear, and beneath it the

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wolds were outlined in colorless grey. A white band of mist drifted along the banks of the Chell, marking its course with silvery vapor. To the West, Ardern's Knoll stood up with a sharp precision, detaching itself with a curious distinctness from the rest of the scene as if aware of its own importance. Ardern's Knoll—yes, the villagers were right when they called it an unlucky place. It could only bring misfortune. She and Guy ought to have chosen another spot for those beautiful, secret meetings, that clandestine courtship. Not this haunted wood which many people actually feared to enter.

The trees of Ardern's Knoll were waving in the wind; she felt as if they were holding out beckoning arms to her.

Olave shivered and went back to bed.

All the morning she was conscious of her mother's watchfulness. She was obliged to remain either with her or near her. Hortense was busy packing, and was in the cross mood of a person who has had unexpected work thrust upon her. Although she inwardly rejoiced at the prospect of leaving Cheldon, she disliked having to make these extremely hurried preparations. Lady Trent came into Olave's room to look at her clothes and to decide what she ought to take. The contents of wardrobes and drawers were arranged very neatly on the bed and sofa. Olave had to stand by while Lady Trent looked at them, making remarks to which her daughter listened with mechanical attention.

"Yes, you'll want that fur-lined coat to travel in. Is that the only thin coat and skirt you have, Olave? We must try to get another in London if there's time. No—not that hat. Yes, all your furs, the winds are cold in Florence. One evening dress and a tea-gown will be quite enough. We shan't go out at all."

All the time Olave felt perfectly incredulous. Of

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course it was impossible, this going to Florence. Guy would never allow it. How senseless all these preparations were. They meant nothing—nothing at all.

Last night she had hardly slept; had lain tossing till the small hours, weary and feverish, and longing for the morning to come. And now the morning seemed almost as interminable as the night had been. Why didn't her mother speak? Why didn't she tell her what and how she knew? It was inhuman to torture her like this. She had never suffered so acutely before in all her life. Those childish punishments had been absurd and trivial, she wondered why she had ever made a fuss about them. Felicity was capable of inflicting a lasting pain upon her—a pain that would follow her all through the years endlessly. She feared her far more than she had ever feared her aunt with her mild discipline. She longed to go away, but if she made the slightest movement toward the door Felicity would say:

"Where are you going, Olave? I wish you to remain here."

No chance of going in the garden, of wandering about the hard, frozen paths in search of Luke. Supposing he had brought back an answer? She had forgotten to tell him that he must not give it to any of the servants. But surely he would understand the pressing need for secrecy. He would hope for more sovereigns perhaps. Olave would have gladly given her last farthing in exchange for a letter from Guy.

Now it was luncheon time. The meal passed in silence, except for an occasional remark from Felicity. She would refer to the journey, to some detail of their departure. Once she said:

"We shall stay perhaps a couple of nights in Paris. If you are very tired we can break the journey again at Milan."

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They were to leave the Manor in time to catch the three-o'clock train to London. After luncheon Olave was going upstairs when Felicity called to her.

"Where are you going, Olave?"

"Only to get my hat and coat. I want to go in the garden."

She felt suddenly helpless. She *must* try to find Luke.

"No—I wish you to stay indoors until we start."

Felicity's voice was very decided.

"But only for ten minutes. My head aches—I want some fresh air."

Her white, distressed face aroused Lady Trent's compassion.

"Very well, I will come with you. You are not to go without me."

Five minutes later they were walking across the terrace together. The sky was blue with almost the blueness of spring, and in a south border there were crocuses and snowdrops—the first flower-children of the year—bravely facing the frosts.

"I want to find Baynes," said Felicity.

They went into the great, walled kitchen-garden where Baynes was almost always to be found, having that "gross partiality for the kitchen plots" which Stevenson considered such an ideal quality in men of his profession. They discovered him at work in one of the greenhouses. At a little distance away Luke was digging.

Olave waited outside while Felicity went to speak to Baynes. Presently, when she thought that her mother's attention was temporarily detached from herself, she walked a few steps toward Luke. Then she stopped and bending down pretended to examine some plants in the herbaceous border, which was always such a conspicuous feature of the garden in summer. It was the pride of Miss Ardern's heart.

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She always brought her visitors hither to see it. Then Olave walked on again till she came close to Luke.

"Luke, did you go? Was there any answer?"

"Yes, miss. I've got un 'ere."

He put his dirty hand into a pocket which was probably still dirtier and drew forth a letter. Olave snatched it and hid it in her dress. Something shining slipped from her hand into Luke's. The lad grinned.

"Thank 'ee kindly, miss! If there wuz anything to take to-night I'd be main glad to go again."

He had spent an evening of revelry at the Ardern Arms on his way home after taking the letter to the Park. He had treated all his friends, displaying his wealth with a boastful triumph yet refusing with a peasant's cunning to reveal the source of it. There would be many nights such as those and he would earn the respect of his companions who had hitherto despised him because his parents kept him in such tutelage.

"No, thank you. You see, we're going away—abroad—" said Olave. "We shall be away from Cheldon for a long time, Luke. But I won't forget you when I come back if you promise never to say a word."

"I promise, miss," said Luke, with a meaning grin which suddenly made Olave feel thoroughly ashamed.

She turned away, hearing her mother's footsteps.

"We must go in now," said Lady Trent briskly; "it will soon be time to get ready. Well, Luke, I hope you are working hard? Baynes tells me you came very late this morning. That'll never do. I have told him if it happens again he must speak to your father, and tell him to see that you get up in good time."

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"Very sorry, my lady. Couldn't you ask Mr. Baynes to overlook it this once, my lady? It shan't never happen again." He looked almost appealingly at Olave.

"Yes, I think we can overlook it this once, Luke. But you must be more punctual in the future."

"Father's a hard man, my lady. If so be he cum to 'ear of it—"

Luke looked sheepish and uncomfortable. He hoped that his escapade at the Ardern Arms last night would not reach Mr. Baynes' ears.

"Well, don't let it happen again," said Felicity, with her careless laugh.

She went back to speak a word to the gardener on the boy's behalf. The old man shook his head.

" 'E wur laäte down at th' Ardern Arms, 'e wur," he said. "That ain't no good for a young chap. Spending his money freely and treatin' all round." He looked dubiously toward Luke.

"Well, we mustn't be hard on him this time. But if it should happen again I expect you'd better say something to his father. It's a pity for a boy like that to get into mischief."

As she and Olave walked down the path back to the house Luke mumbled to himself. "Tell my father, would she? 'Er'd better look arter 'er own."

But his hand was fumbling in his pocket, where he fingered lovingly the second sovereign that Olave had bestowed upon him.

Olave went into the dressing-room to prepare for her journey. She shut the door and with hands that trembled with excitement she drew forth Guy's letter. It contained only a few lines, and had evidently been written in haste the previous evening.

"Beloved, I am very sorry, but I somehow expected it. We must meet in London. I leave here early to-morrow. Look out to-morrow night be-

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tween six and seven and you may see a man waiting under the lamp-post in Waverton Street. He will have a letter from me appointing a meeting. If I can possibly prevent it you shall not go to Florence."

Olave slipped it back inside her blouse and began to dress for the journey to London. It was a comfort to feel that Guy was already there.

CHAPTER XXX

OLAVE'S FIRST MASS

LADY TRENT wondered several times during the journey to London whether Olave's obstinate and continued silence would ever break down. They sat opposite to each other, the sole occupants of a first-class compartment, until Paddington was reached. The approaches to the city were blurred with a yellow fog which was not so dense but that the houses were indeterminately visible, illuminated with the wan ghosts of lights and painted as if in a monochrome of yellowish grey.

From time to time Felicity glanced at the little, pale, stony face from which the pride and triumph of those last days at Cheldon had become completely obliterated. Once or twice she caught Olave's eyes fixed upon herself with a dull curiosity in which admiration and hostility seemed to be ambiguously mingled. Olave spoke as little as possible, and then only to make monosyllabic replies to her mother's questions. For the moment Lady Trent had stepped in and conquered; she had cried "check" and was perhaps waiting to see if there would be any response to her move.

Felicity was not without fear for the immediate

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future. But she could not believe that Olave had found a means of communicating to Guy this sudden decision of hers. He was probably unaware of their journey, might still indeed be spending fruitless afternoons of waiting in Ardern's Knoll.

"I will save her," thought Lady Trent to herself; "she's younger even than I was. I won't let her spoil her life just for the sake of saving her from a little pain now."

More than once Clibborn's counsel recurred to her mind, although she persistently endeavored to dismiss it. He had recommended what seemed to her heroic impossible remedies. The talk of Catholicism for instance. She had been surprised and a little irritated that he had not seen eye to eye with her upon this point. For a man who was not a Catholic it was an extraordinary suggestion; she began to wonder whether he had "leanings." At any rate he had evidently regarded it as a possible solution of the difficulty. She had never concerned herself with the spiritual side of Olave's education. She had concluded that it was just what other girls received, neither more nor less. Agnes had no doubt seen to it; she had left everything to Agnes, confident in her absolute trustworthiness. But in this dilemma the ordinary solutions were of little avail. And to attempt to place the whole thing upon a spiritual plane, to apply spiritual remedies to it, seemed to Lady Trent little short of absurd. It wasn't practical, and she wondered that Alick Clibborn, a practical hard-headed, worldly-wise man, should even have suggested it. He had seemed deeply concerned about Olave's future. And there had been a definite reproach in his tone when he had told her that the girl should never have been allowed to stray so far.

"Well, I mean to try practical remedies first," thought Lady Trent.

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The house at Waverton Street was all lighted up and ready for their reception. Its warm atmosphere of comfort was especially grateful after the yellow fog outside that was now gradually thickening over the city. Mrs. Smith, the ancient housekeeper, who had grown grey in Felicity's service, came up into the hall to greet them. Tea was awaiting them in the drawing-room, which for Olave was so full of memories of Guy.

The hot tea thawed her a little. It was nearly six and soon Guy's messenger would be waiting for her outside. She hoped that he would not lose his way in the fog. Her brain was busily planning how best she could presently escape downstairs.

Felicity lingered over her tea, as if she were feeling both indolent and fatigued and unwilling to move from the comfortable arm-chair near the fire.

"I should think we might start for Paris on Tuesday. I thought at first the day after to-morrow but we must do some shopping first. And if this fog continues it will, of course, delay us. I hate crossing the Channel in a fog."

Olave listened but said nothing. What had these plans to do with her? Nothing. By the time Tuesday came she hoped that she would be Guy's wife. Perhaps they might even be on their way to Italy. It was useless to discuss other journeys.

Yet when she looked at her mother's calm, resolute face and dark, shining eyes a feeling of hopelessness came over her. She felt weak and helpless.

"If you're tired, Olave, you can go up to your room and rest a little before dinner."

Olave rose. She went to the window and drew aside the blind. Everything in the fog looked distorted and exaggerated, the people who walked on the pavement, the carriages and carts and motors that went slowly, carefully, along the road. There

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was something blurred and monstrous and fantastic about them all. The world seemed suddenly to have lost all sharp and defined outlines.

Beneath the gas-lamp, a few yards from the window there stood the motionless figure of a man huddled almost to the ears in a coat with a big collar, and wearing a hat drawn down over his brows. A short, ill-built figure. As Olave looked out she saw him glance up at the window as if attracted by the sudden flare of light caused by the drawing aside of the blind.

She dropped the blind and went slowly out of the room. She was careful to control her movements, to make them indolent and lethargic. It would be fatal to excite Felicity's suspicions by any manifestation or haste or eagerness. She went up to her own room and waited till she heard her mother come upstairs and close the door of her bedroom. She could hear voices—probably Hortense was there, unpacking, arranging things.

Olave went quietly downstairs. She had taken off her hat but she still wore her thick, traveling coat. There was no one about. With a heart that beat very fast she opened the front door and left it ajar. She beckoned to the man who came forward.

"Miss Trent?" he said in a muffled voice.

"Yes," said Olave.

He drew a letter from his pocket and handed it to her.

"There's no answer," he said, and before she could even think of rewarding him he had suddenly vanished into the fog.

Olave crept back into the house and closed the door noiselessly. On the stairs she met Hortense who looked at her, as she believed, with suspicion. But she only asked if she could do anything for her and passed on toward Felicity's room. It had been

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a narrow escape. A few minutes earlier the maid might have seen her entering the house.

Now she was back safely in her own room. No one was likely to disturb her at this hour. She sat down near the fire and opened Guy's letter. Her first impression was one of sharp disappointment because it was so short, containing only a few lines. But it was only the second letter she had received from him, and this circumstance made it precious whatever its length, whatever its content. She read it.

"I must see you and explain the difficulties that stand in the way of our immediate marriage. They are almost, although not quite, insurmountable. I want you to come to the Catholic Church in Farm Street to-morrow morning at eight o'clock. You will find me there. I will meet you in the porch. G. Q."

Almost, although not quite, insurmountable. They were strange words for Guy to use, and as Olave read them over and over again the misgivings they had aroused seemed to deepen immeasurably; to deepen, indeed, in such a manner that for the first time she envisaged defeat. Guy had always appeared so carelessly confident of his own ability to carry the matter through successfully, and now his assurance seemed to have left him. What did he mean? Was he going to draw back, to leave her to her miserable fate? Was he to show himself faithless to her as once he had proved faithless to Felicity? She had believed utterly in his love. She had been ready—oh, almost from the very first day—to put her fate into his hands! Now the difficulties were almost, though not quite, insurmountable. The words struck her heart with a sense of icy chill. Now when everything depended upon Guy's firmness of purpose and will to overcome all conceivable obstacles, he could prate of difficulties that were almost insurmountable.

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All night she lay awake, feverish, uneasy, with an ever-increasing presentiment of approaching misfortune. The words of Guy's letter danced in front of her eyes when she lay awake, and finally followed her into her short restless dreams when they became flaming, winged things that pursued her pitilessly with sinister and hostile intent. Toward morning she fell into a deeper slumber, when all remembrance of the letter was mercifully blotted out. She was aroused by the entry of Hortense with a tray containing her morning tea. The maid went to the blind and pulled it up with a sharp sound. Outside the fog still lingered, though slightly less thick than it had been last night.

"Her ladyship will take her breakfast in bed, mademoiselle," said Hortense. "But she wishes you to have yours in the dining-room at nine o'clock and then to wait for her till she is ready to go out with you."

The message was delivered with an almost mechanical respect.

"Very well, Hortense," said Olave.

She glanced at the clock. It was a quarter past seven. She would have to dress quickly. She swallowed some tea and then made a hasty toilette. The hot tea warmed her and gave her a certain courage to face the morning's adventure.

Eight o'clock was the hour of the servants' breakfast. Hortense would therefore be having that repast in company with Mrs. Smith in the little room at the back of the kitchen, well out of sight of the front-door. Felicity would not stir for another two hours, she always rose later on Sundays. The house was thus perfectly quiet when Olave descended the stairs and went out into the raw, foggy street.

She knew her way, for she had sometimes passed the church of the Jesuit Fathers standing in its ob-

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scure position in the midst of the mews and garages of Farm Street. When she came near to it she saw Guy's tall unmistakable figure standing there, evidently waiting for her. As she approached, she saw that he looked blue and pinched as if the bitter air had frozen him. But his face brightened as she came up.

"What a choking fog—it's better inside," he said.

They stood for a moment inside the porch facing each other in the wan grey light.

"You have never been present at Mass, have you, Olave?"

"No, never." Her face expressed astonishment. Why did he not tell her at once the details of those difficulties which he had mentioned in his letter? Why did he defer the evil moment?

"It is just going to begin," said Guy, and he pushed open the door and entered the church.

There was nothing for Olave to do but to follow him.

"It won't make us too late?" she whispered, as he moved toward a bench at the back of the church.

"No. If you're back by nine surely that will do."

"A little before," said Olave.

"Yes, yes," said Guy, with a touch of impatience.

He knelt down and Olave followed his example. Almost at once a priest came in by a side door wearing a red vestment and accompanied by a young acolyte. He genuflected before the high altar and began to say Mass. Olave watched attentively.

When once she had recovered from her temporary annoyance at being forced to enter the church in this way, she began to feel strangely thrilled by the thought that Guy had asked her to come, associating her with his religion which in the old days had, as she knew, meant a great deal more to him than it did now. She had often wished to know more about

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it, for she always supposed that after they were married one of her first steps would be to become a Catholic. In her ignorance she supposed that this change of faith would mean very little more than the obligation to attend a different church on Sundays. Of the spiritual bonds which it would entail she knew nothing. It attracted her because it was the Church to which Guy belonged. She glanced furtively at him.

His chin was propped on his hands and he was gazing with very bright, attentive eyes toward the high altar. She had an instinctive feeling that all his thoughts were now closely concentrated upon it, and that as far as was, humanly-speaking, possible he had forgotten almost her very presence. Why was he so different to-day—so absorbed, so detached? Almost as if she didn't exist for him. Yet he had made her come. She had run untold risks in coming here this morning. She was a long way from Guy in spirit and all of a sudden she became apprehensively aware of it. Once she even put out a timid hand and touched his sleeve, but he did not notice the gesture. He was like a man in a curious waking trance.

Love is capable of strange miracles, and perhaps one of its strangest is the power of intuition it so often bestows. Before many minutes had gone by Olave had become convinced that the difficulties of which Guy had spoken and which perhaps he would presently disclose to her were in the main spiritual ones. They must be in some obscure manner connected with his Church. Although he had been a faithless son, there were things that held him still. He was neither bound nor free. But he had not broken all the bonds; she had felt sometimes when he spoke of it that his heart was not untouched by regret, by remorse.

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He was following the Mass with the greatest possible attention. At the Gospel he rose and crossed himself on brow and lips and breast with a free accustomed gesture as if it had long been a familiar one to him. During the Creed he made a profound genuflection, imitating the example of the priest. Whatever measure of carelessness he had been guilty of in the past he was at least perfectly familiar with every detail of the ceremony. Olave was made to realize, seeing him now, that he was a Catholic, acquainted with his religion in a very intimate manner. She was aware, perhaps for the first time, that his apparent, outward carelessness had not meant an actual loss of faith.

Was that faith to step in and separate them now?

Her attention became riveted now on the scene before her. Something of the fog that enveloped the outside world to-day had penetrated into the church accentuating the darkness and gloom of the winter morning. The altar with its lights made a patch of somewhat subdued and obscure illumination at the far end of the church. She fell to watching the priest's movements as he performed that holy and mystic, but to her incomprehensible, rite. Suddenly a bell rang sharply. Guy bent forward and bowed his head.

Olave knew roughly the teaching of the Catholic Church in regard to the Sacrifice of the Mass. She knew a little also of the teaching of the Church concerning the mystery of the Blessed Sacrament. She had learned of these things in a Protestant history book which taught her the negation of such faith. They had been dealt with in those chapters which had reference to the Reformation in England when the old order had been swept away. But because of this knowledge she was aware that at any rate for Catholics this moment was a very holy and a very sacred one. It was dedicated to ineffable transcen-

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dental mysteries, in the truth of which many millions of persons throughout the world believed. Many had consented to die painful and ignoble and shameful deaths rather than abjure the faith they held concerning them. Even little children had dauntlessly faced death in the arena at Rome rather than swerve from this belief.

When the bell rang again she raised her eyes and saw the Host uplifted above the priest's head, that all might see and adore. Olave instinctively bowed her head and covered her face with her hands. She felt ignorant and astray. She envied Guy his superior knowledge, his attitude of tense devotion. She had never imagined that he could be so devout, so absorbed. She felt that she was seeing him to-day under a new aspect.

All at once it came into her mind—sharpened by anxiety and some dim foreboding of approaching calamity—that Guy's Church would undoubtedly condemn his past actions. It would condemn above all perhaps that plan of a clandestine marriage. Perhaps it would mean that they could not be married in a Catholic church and she knew that Guy had set his heart upon this. Yes, the difficulty was almost, although not quite, insurmountable. But there was a loophole of escape. They could be married quietly in a Protestant church. She must persuade Guy to do that for her sake. She must make him see that she came before everything, that he could not forsake her now for a trivial scruple. Were not all churches, Catholic and Protestant alike, dedicated to God? There could be no harm therefore in having it at another church where perhaps fewer questions would be asked. How she would cling to that frail hope that presented itself. She had done so many wrong things for Guy's sake; he could easily make a little sacrifice now for her.

All her being was scourged into an unnatural fev-

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erish excitement. She sat up in her seat and looked about her. Guy was still kneeling there, oblivious, unnoticing, cruelly indifferent. He must surely guess that she was suffering torments of suspense. But he was there, close to her yet so far away, not thinking of her, perhaps not caring for her.

Why had he made her come? They were wasting precious moments—perhaps the last they would spend together. If Guy's courage gave way now she would have nothing before her but that terrible journey to Florence. She saw herself living with her mother, with Aunt Aggie, a child to be reproved and kept in subjection, always conscious that they were waiting for her to exhibit some sign of contrition, of repentance. And she had had this glorious taste of liberty—of love. Why was Guy wasting these moments in prayers? He could come here to pray at any time. She began to feel a resentment that was almost anger. Had he had some ulterior purpose in making her come? Had he always meant that she should be present at Mass? The tension became unbearable. She glanced at her watch. Twenty minutes past eight. And she felt she had been there for weeks—years. She ought to be going home. What would Mrs. Smith think when she opened the door to her? Would she tell Lady Trent that she had been wandering out alone in the fog? How much did the servants at Cheldon know of the cause of their sudden departure? Hortense had probably related all she knew on arriving at Waverton Street. But perhaps by the time she went home there would be no further need of concealment. She would know then all about the difficulties—the difficulties that were almost, though not quite, insurmountable. Perhaps even by then Guy would have told her it was impossible for them to be married. Unless, of course, Lady Trent gave the permission which she was never likely to give.

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Olave rose and moved away. A spirit of restlessness had come over her; she felt no longer able to remain there. Even Guy's nearness irritated and confused her. Once she turned her head. Yes, he was still kneeling there with bowed head and hidden face. He hadn't missed her—didn't know perhaps that she had moved.

Olave choked back a sob. She walked round the church, examining the different altars. She wondered why there were so many, each apparently dedicated to a particular saint. She came to one with a statue of Our Lady; it seemed to look at her with calm, wise pitying eyes. Catholics prayed to the Blessed Virgin; she could remember stories of such prayers being miraculously granted. It was quite usual for them to ask for her prayers, her intercession. Her thoughts framed themselves into words, which she uttered in a low whisper: "Won't you help me? Won't you? *Won't* you? Even though I'm a Protestant? Can't you see my heart's breaking? Pray for me that I may marry Guy. Don't, please, let anything come between us. I love him so much." The tears streamed unchecked down her face. She went on a little further and stopped in front of a large Crucifix.

But that—that was unbearable. Such suffering, such agony of desolation, such cruel wounds, for the redemption of the world. *For you—for you.* Olave almost felt as if the figure hanging there were whispering to her. Why wasn't there a Crucifix at Cheldon in the little Norman church? Perhaps long ago there had been one for people to pray and weep before, till it was broken by Cromwell's soldiers who had swept the Gloucestershire churches clear of "graven images." One ought to have a Crucifix always before one—to remind one. Else you were likely to forget, not to care, to think it didn't concern you. Perhaps if she had had one in her room at the

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Manor she might have been afraid to do all that she had done. Afraid to disobey, to deceive, time after time, day after day. Yet she had only wanted happiness—to love Guy, to be loved by him, to be with him forever. Then surely it would be easy to be always good. She threw back her head defiantly. She wasn't going to be a pitiful coward, to draw back afraid at the eleventh hour with the happiness she desired within actual reach. Afterward, perhaps, she would come back here and kneel down and ask to be forgiven.

The atmosphere of the church, its quietness, the vague yet pervasive odor of incense, the statues, and above all the Crucifix were holding Olave with invisible powerful bonds. She saw now quite clearly why Guy had brought her here. He wanted her to understand that they must part, and why. It was terrible.

Her face was white and still had traces of tears upon it as she turned and approached Guy. Mass was over; the priest had disappeared. She went up to Quinn and together they left the church.

CHAPTER XXXI

GUY EXPLAINS THE INSURMOUNTABLE DIFFICULTY

"LET'S go into the park," said Guy.

Olave was about to remonstrate, to remind him of the lateness of the hour, of the precious moments he had wilfully wasted, but a glance at his face, still stern and composed, arrested her. She must do as he wished this once.

They walked on in silence till they came to Stanhope Gate. The trees seen through the obscuring

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fog seemed almost fantastic in shape. There were very few people about at that early hour. No one took any notice of them. Guy found a seat, and they sat down side by side before he spoke again.

"Olave," he said, "I daresay my letter last night made you wonder what had happened."

"Yes. I couldn't sleep. I was afraid—of all sorts of things. Guy, you mustn't say anything to hurt me now—I couldn't bear it."

"I am afraid you will have to hear it," he said. "I went yesterday to see a very old friend of mine, a priest whom I had known as a boy. I told him of my intention to marry you as soon as possible in a Catholic church. Of course, there are certain formalities to be observed because you are not a Catholic. And for me—there are certain things I have to do. It may sound strange to you, but one of them is that I have to go to confession before my marriage. Marriage is a sacrament with us, one must be in a state of grace to receive it. I was ready to comply although it is not easy. But, Olave, he said something else. He said that no priest fully aware of all the circumstances could possibly marry us."

There was a long pause. He seemed to be waiting for her to speak.

"If they make it so difficult for you," said Olave at last, "I suppose the only thing to do will be to have our wedding in a Protestant church. After all, there won't be anything very strange about it. I am a Protestant."

Guy did not at first answer her. He was looking straight in front of him almost as if he could see visions in the thick curtain of fog. Every now and then figures like grey indeterminate ghosts emerged from the unnatural obscurity, passed them, materializing as they did so into human shapes, and then vanished rapidly after becoming once more formless

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insubstantial wraiths, melting into the blinding yellow mists that made London that morning into a city of dreadful night.

"You see that would be quite impossible for me," said Guy. "I must be married in a Catholic church. But as I have just told you it is a sacrament, and to approach that sacrament I have to go to confession —to receive absolution—to be in a state of grace. I am told that under the circumstances no priest could or would give me absolution. You are very young—you are not of age—your mother is against the marriage. It would be impossible for me to get the necessary permission to marry a Protestant. There are always difficulties in the way of a mixed marriage, but I did not know they were so formidable." He spoke in a restrained almost mechanical tone.

"But if we were married in a Protestant church there wouldn't be any difficulty. Marriages like that do take place," she urged.

"I know they do," he said, "but I am a Catholic."

The acrid bitter taste of the fog threatened to choke Olave. Its smarting touch brought tears to her eyes. The fog seemed to her a malignant thing which blotted out all the bright loveliness of the world. Her physical misery was intense and almost eclipsed the desolating sorrow that his words were producing in her heart.

"I want you to look at it for a moment from my point of view," he continued presently. "I want you to understand there are barriers I cannot and dare not overpass. You may think it can't—you may tell me that I have not paid much attention to these things—but Olave," he looked at her with an appeal that touched her in spite of herself, "I am up against something at last that is stronger than I am."

Her voice was harsh with emotion as she answered him.

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"You want me to go back to my old life just as if nothing had happened? To make this odious journey with mother? To tell her and put myself in her hands? You are asking me to bear this kind of separation?"

Guy was silent.

"Isn't your love for me greater—stronger—than anything else?" There was bitterness in her voice. "You said once that it was—you made me believe you!"

"It is stronger than everything else except this one thing."

"Guy, don't draw back now! You've surely known all along it would not be very easy. But let me help you to overpass these barriers. Why shouldn't my church do as well as yours?"

He took her hand. Even through her glove he could feel how cold it was.

"Olave, beloved, you mustn't tempt me. Don't let our love 'rob us of immortal things.'"

"But it isn't *my* religion," she protested. "Love and happiness matter more to me than *any* religion."

"Perhaps one of these days it will be your religion too. Olave, I want to run straight now—to keep my square. You can help me. I have strayed far."

"And you think it matters so much—all that this priest said to you?"

"I am sure it does."

"More than our happiness? More even than our love?"

"Yes, even more than that. Because you see if we fought against it now there would be no solid happiness for us."

"You have changed so quickly. Only three days ago you were making plans so eagerly. Is it all this—priest's doings?"

"Yes. I went to him for advice. I knew that he

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cared for me very much, in the way priests do care, for one's soul. He had a great deal to do with me when I was a boy. I had not been near him for many years. Yet he told me there had never been a single day when he had not remembered me in his Mass, unless he were prevented by illness from saying it. He urged me not to delay—to go to confession—to make my peace. He asked me to remember that we can never count upon a single hour of life. These things are in the hand of God. Yet He does not desire the destruction of any that die. He gives time —opportunity—abundant grace."

"Guy, I haven't your faith. I have nothing to help me. You mustn't go away and leave me like this. I couldn't bear it!"

They heard muffled, approaching footsteps. Out of the fog a man emerged, looked at them with a kind of idle curiosity, and then passed on into invisibility, as if swallowed up.

"If you go away now all my light will be blotted out."

"No, not that," and he drew her to him and kissed her as if assuring her of a devotion made stronger and more perfect because of the sacrifice imposed upon it. "We are pledged to each other. In time we shall surely persuade your mother to relent. If not, we must wait until you come of age. Then you will have a right to choose."

"Nearly four years—it's an eternity."

"We must pray that the time may be shortened."

His influence, always strong, was gradually compelling her, with an assumption of its old sway, to accept something of his point of view. In her heart too she knew that he was right. Had they ever been absolutely happy during all those days of their secret meetings, to obtain which she had had recourse to such endless deceptions? No, the past had

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been a time of torment as well as of delight. There had been something guilty in that feverish uneasy joy, those fervors that had transported her into another world, which had characterized their meetings in Ardern's Knoll. Only by systematic deception had she been able to purchase those few hours of uneasy happiness. She had the feeling now that a power higher than any human power had intervened to separate her from Guy, to put an end to all the deceit, the falsehoods. What had Guy said? That one could not count upon a single hour of life, that God did not desire the destruction of any that die. The destruction of any that die—he must have referred to the ultimate destruction, not of the body but of the soul. There was something awful in these words, as if pointing to an afterward that the flesh might well shrink from. Was it fear that had actuated Guy to come to this terrible decision in which he preferred to risk the separation from her than to offend the Church he had so long faithlessly deserted? He was not a coward. There must be another motive, a holier motive. Love, perhaps. She remembered his calm devout face at Mass, more beautiful than she had ever seen it. Yes, where one loved one feared to offend. He had not been faithless to her; he had returned to another allegiance, an earlier and more powerful Love, everlasting, immortal. He could not separate himself, deliberately, ultimately from these things. She had always known of their presence in his heart, he had never been able to drive them utterly away. The change in him was a spiritual one, transforming the man utterly. She turned to him abruptly.

"Why did you make me go to Mass? I had never been before. Half the time I didn't understand in the least what was going on. But I understood," and now her voice dropped a little, "the

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Crucifix. I felt that if I had always had one in my room at home I should never have dared to do and say the things that I have done."

There was something vehement and passionate now in her tone, as if she made the confession with an angry reluctance, half unwilling to reveal to him that it had affected her in this way.

He knew then that he had conquered. She would not try to persuade him any more. He loved her too much to feel sure, even now, of his own strength.

"You must not blame me too much," he said, "for it was you yourself made me wish that I could come to you worthily, honorably. It was my fault that you did things which must have been continually against your conscience. It was my fault that you deceived your mother—disobeyed her by meeting me day after day. It has been a mistake from beginning to end."

He was looking at Olave with a strange tenderness in his face.

"I love you," he said, "always remember that. If God is merciful we shall not have to wait long for each other."

He drew her to him and kissed her. The fog closed about them.

CHAPTER XXXII

CLIBBORN SETTLES THE MATTER

It was after ten o'clock when Olave returned at last to Waverton Street. She had been utterly oblivious of the passing of time, aware that in that fateful hour her immediate destiny had been decided. There was no hope of turning Guy back from his

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set purpose. Strong forces were warring against them, things that were more powerful than human love. Implacable things against which one could not rebel without suffering immortal hurt. She had parted from Guy on the doorstep with tears in her eyes, putting up her face to be kissed as if for an eternal farewell. When he had left her she rang the bell and the door was opened by Hortense.

She went into the dining-room and found Felicity there, dressed to go out. She had been waiting for Olave, whose absence had been discovered more than an hour ago. She had felt anxious about her on account of the fog. What was she doing out alone at this hour? As the fog thickened, Felicity's anxiety had become acute. She was much more relieved than angry when Olave came into the room.

The girl looked tired and exhausted and slightly disheveled. Her hair was all moist with the fog and hung about her forehead in loose, dark rings. There was mud on her shoes. When she saw her mother she came forward reluctantly, hesitatingly.

"Mother, I am sorry," and her voice trembled a little as if from scarcely controlled emotion, while her eyes were very bright with unshed tears. "Yes, I have been with Guy—I think for the last time. Don't blame me too much—I am very unhappy."

Her face assumed suddenly a curious, frozen look.

Felicity stretched out her hand and took Olave's cold one in hers.

"Tell me, Olave, dear," she said. There was something in her daughter's face that prevented her from uttering a single word of reproach. She was aware that she was suffering; she had an impulse to comfort her.

"We meant to run away—to get married. Guy was in London too, arranging it. I never intended to go abroad with you. But now—" she paused, and

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then added simply, "it's more difficult than Guy supposed. We couldn't be married in a Catholic church —he explained why. He met me to-day to tell me."

"He has not changed?" said Felicity. She did not know at that moment whether she wished to hear Olave reply in the affirmative or not.

"Not in his love—he still loves me," said Olave; "but he can't marry me like that in his own church. My not being of age, our running away and getting married without your approval, all that would make it impossible for Guy. It would be wrong—he couldn't get absolution. To be married in his own church he must go to confession, and receive absolution. It's his Church that has come between us. And he utterly refuses to be married anywhere else. That would have been possible, but even for me, he wouldn't do it."

But Felicity was thinking of Clibborn's words. He at least had never undervalued the spiritual bonds that can hold a man—even a careless man. He had wished Olave to receive this gift; he had regarded it as perhaps the one thing in all the world that could help her in this crisis of her young life.

Felicity was not greatly astonished when she listened to this recital. She had always known from her own experience of Guy that there were barriers he would not easily overpass. To be married in any other church but his own would be impossible to him. He had the Catholic's faith in the sacrament of marriage, its sanctity, its indissolubility. Without absolution he could not approach it. He had come to the cross-roads and Felicity, who was inclined to regard all spiritual bonds with incredulity, perceived that hard-pressed as he must have been by a love whose force she could no longer doubt on the one hand, and these religious scruples on the other, he had deliberately chosen the harder path. She felt as if

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she were looking at him from a new angle, as at a man who possessed standards of a harsh, dogmatic, authentic kind and although he often pitifully failed to attain to them they formed a rock-like basis in his character and life that was of supreme and undeniable worth. She saw him, too, as a human soul struggling in darkness, all the time aware of that region where light is to be found, yet shrinking from it and turning away his eyes as if in dread of that sudden, blinding vision.

Mechanically she poured out some hot coffee and gave it to Olave who sat there looking pale and miserable and but little inclined to eat.

The abrupt change in the situation confused and perplexed Felicity. She knew that her daughter was suffering, and yet in a sense that she understood and appreciated the very things that were separating herself from Guy. She was not suffering as an ignorant child suffers; she was able even to recognize that Guy was right. She had her absolute confidence in his love to sustain her. She had no fear at all that he would fail her. He loved her and he would wait. But for the moment their prospect of happiness was blotted out. Where all Felicity's weak little attempts had failed to produce any change, Guy had himself effected it, completely, inexorably.

"What made him suddenly think of these things?" Lady Trent asked.

"He went to see a priest he used to know as a boy to ask him about our marriage. He knew there would be difficulties but I don't think he expected them to be such great ones. We met at Farm Street this morning—he made me hear Mass. I thought perhaps he believed it would help me. It does help Catholics, you know. It didn't help me because I didn't understand enough. But there was a Crucifix —" She paused, as if unwilling, now that it came

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to the point, to reveal such an intimate personal impression.

"Yes?" said Felicity, leaning a little forward.

"When I saw it I felt sorry for all that I had done."

Clibborn was right then. He had recommended that Olave should be given what he called spiritual props. He had known something of the power and authority of the Catholic Church, that divine institution which held Guy so fast in its chains. Mocked at, derided and denied as on the first day, that power of the Cross was still something that had to be reckoned with, something undying, eternal, whose claims could not lightly be set aside. Olave's words rang in her head:

"When I saw it I felt sorry for all that I had done."

And Clibborn had told her she had refused to give Olave the one thing that could help her. Was he right? Who was right in this world of perplexity and confusion? Her own case had been far less complicated and bewildering than Olave's. Was it because the new generation was crying out for something more—something for which she herself had never felt the pressing need? Something, too, that England had once possessed, had loved, had valued?

She must see Clibborn. His clear vision would help her now. She had come to rely upon him, to look to him for guidance, for counsel.

Lady Trent had for many years led that kind of wandering life which is of all lives perhaps the most free from responsibility. She had deliberately emancipated herself from all ties, and she had enjoyed her freedom. When last year she had suddenly resolved to assume once more her long neglected rights over Olave her real difficulties had begun. She had

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returned at a crisis and she had found herself unable to cope with it. She had discovered in herself a weakness, an indecision, and above all a powerlessness to win that love and loyalty from her daughter which she felt she had a right to expect. That new life had not been productive of harmony, and a disaster had been narrowly averted—a disaster which would perhaps have separated her from Olave forever. She felt that she could never have forgiven her if she had carried out this plan of running away and getting married secretly to Guy. Felicity was a proud woman and she felt that the scandal involved would have shamed her. The world would have blamed her for having so little control over a girl of seventeen. She would have failed openly and notoriously in a task that had become almost the passion of her life. Yet, she had known that in those months she and Olave had spent together they had been drifting ever more surely apart. She had come too late, and the maximum of punishment was to be meted out to her for those long years of neglect and indifference.

In order to give her a free hand with Olave, Agnes had left Cheldon and gone abroad. It had been of no use except to give Olave more ample opportunities for deceiving her, for carrying on this clandestine love affair, almost, but not quite, to a successful conclusion.

Silently, doggedly on both sides, the long duel had been fought out. Felicity had learned patience, but she had not won her daughter's love. It had added to her suffering to realize that daily the girl was growing dearer to her. The wish to prevent her from wrecking her life, as her own had been wrecked, had become ever stronger within her. Now everything had collapsed. There was no need now for any further deception on Olave's part, nor for any

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further effort and counter-scheming on Lady Trent's. Across the narrowly-averted catastrophe, as Felicity secretly called it, she and Olave stood face to face with each other at last, with all the barriers between them in ruined heaps at their feet.

Olave had made no petition. She had not once said to Felicity: "If you give your permission we can be married," as Lady Trent had expected that she would. No, the girl was evidently without hope from that quarter. She was prepared to face the long separation from Guy. She was calm with the dreadful calmness of one who has been stunned. Perhaps she was not yet fully conscious of all that Guy's decision had involved. When she awoke to it there would be more pain, more suffering.

For the first time Lady Trent began to see the situation from Olave's point of view. It was this that made her send a little urgent note to Clibborn begging him to come to see her that afternoon. She had made up her mind to tell him everything without reserve. If he advised hard and difficult things she was almost prepared to follow his advice. She felt unable to leave things exactly as they were, to return to Cheldon with Olave and take up the threads of their life there as if nothing had happened. All that she had intended to accomplish had been achieved without her help, and yet the consciousness of failure had never been more apparent to her.

Clibborn appeared about five o'clock, having performed the journey on foot in preference to trusting himself to any other mode of transit. He had been so long away from England that such a thing as a London fog was almost new to him and he rebelled against the restrictions it imposed. He had even lost his way in it more than once, and had almost at one moment considered the desirability of turning back. People couldn't expect you to turn up in such a fog! But there had been something urgent in

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Felicity's message that encouraged him to persevere, and he was afraid too that if he did not go to-day he might miss her altogether.

Besides he badly wanted to elicit a definite answer from her before she went abroad.

He felt certain, however, that her own affairs were not occupying Lady Trent's attention at the moment. That girl of hers! He wondered what fresh developments he should be called upon to hear. He liked Olave, that charming likeness to her mother, as of a Felicity slightly modernized and brought up-to-date, enchanted him. He wished to help them both, the mother as well as the daughter. It was such a pity they couldn't be close, intimate friends.

Arrived at Waverton Street, which seemed to him more than ever charming and luxurious after the conditions that prevailed without, he found Felicity alone. Olave had asked to be allowed to go to Benediction at Farm Street, and, although the request had surprised Felicity, she had acquiesced only stipulating that Hortense should accompany her. It was a significant concession for Lady Trent to make. "But if it will comfort her"—she had thought, feeling distressed as she looked at that calm, frozen face.

"Well, Felicity?" said Clibborn, pulling a comfortable arm-chair close to the fire. "Any further developments?"

"Yes," said Lady Trent. She lit a cigarette and pushed the box toward him.

When they had smoked in silence for some minutes she began quietly to tell him all that had happened, with a careful close attention to detail as if she were afraid of omitting any part that might be essential to his task of forming a right judgment upon the case. Even those words of Olave's: *"When I saw it I felt sorry for all that I had done"* were faithfully repeated.

Clibborn listened in silence. Was it not a curious

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confirmation of his own warning to Felicity? He was not at all the man to say, "I told you so," but he could not listen to her without a sense of triumph that she had been compelled at last to face the situation from that particular point of view.

"And now—I want your advice," she said.

"But it's all comfortably settled, isn't it?—and just in the way you wished. The young people have taken it out of your hands. I must own, in a very astonishing manner. And now there's no need for you to go abroad unless you really wish to. But that's for you to decide."

"If you were to see Olave now you would not be so ready to call it comfortably settled." Felicity's voice was strained. "They are engaged to each other—they are very much in love. But for this religious scruple they would probably have been married without my knowledge to-morrow morning. And I am keeping them apart."

He rejoined with a prompt: "But isn't that just what you've been trying to do?"

"Alick—you know what I mean. Have I any right—?"

"A mother has every right to prevent a girl of seventeen from marrying a man of whom she doesn't approve."

She felt that he was purposely avoiding the question.

"I—I don't feel sure about anything to-day. I suppose one always feels a brute if one purposely destroys the happiness of another person even from the best of motives."

"And Olave?"

"She's rather stunned. The odd thing is that she's accepting it quite quietly, without any remonstrance. I should never have done that!"

"You never had," he reminded her, "the kind of help these two are having."

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"But Olave isn't having any real help. I suppose Guy has the satisfaction of knowing that he's obeying the laws of his Church. But that hardly touches her."

"She's too much in love not to want to adjust herself to his point of view. Where is she now?"

"I've let her go to Benediction. She asked and I couldn't refuse. Will you tell me something, Alick? Ought I to let her become a Catholic—to prepare her in the end to be Guy's wife—if they both still wish it?"

Now she had done what he had been patiently waiting for. She had made quite clear to him the kind of counsel she was demanding of him. He had wanted a frank statement of the case. But he had known all the time that this question had been uppermost in her mind.

"I am not infallible and my advice is probably not worth having. But, if you ask me, I may as well tell you candidly that my answer is yes. *C'est indiqué.* And then you will be in a position to ask at least that your daughter may marry a good practising Catholic."

His voice was very grave, but his eyes as they rested upon her were kind and full of sympathy. She said:

"I want to do what's right. I want to *help* Olave. Not to thwart her everywhere."

"It must be very difficult when one's children differ so fundamentally from one," he said. "Especially when they fall so early under influences we shouldn't ourselves have chosen for them. But we must remember they live in another period; their needs are different. The world moves fast in these days, and even a few years makes a great difference in outlook and point of view. You can't tie them down, therefore, to precisely the life you prefer for yourself and for them. They have their rights."

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"Alick, you are asking me to make great sacrifices."

"Yes," he agreed.

"And I can not be sure that you are right. Many people would say that you are wrong. People who would use all their authority and power to prevent their children from becoming Roman Catholics."

"I know that. But you are not one of those people, Felicity. There's a movement now—who can deny it?—toward the old Faith. Some even think it's getting stronger every year. I sometimes remember those tremendous words: *And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*" He paused for a moment. "And don't you see what it's done for Guy, pulling him up short at the eleventh hour when his love for Olave, you would think, was about the strongest thing in his life and capable of overcoming all obstacles? I like that, you know. I admire the authority of the Roman Church, the obedience she exacts even from the careless indifferent ones among her children. The feeling that they can't go beyond a certain point. And so, when it comes to your own child, for God's sake give her the things she asks for when she asks for something that can help her to solve the enormous problems that life offers at every step of the way. Don't imagine it'll separate her from you. If she's the girl I take her for, she'll be grateful to you till the last hour of her life for not having put any obstacles in the way of her becoming a Catholic!"

He spoke with a warm passionate eagerness that astonished while it swayed her.

"I do believe you are right, Alick. And if Aggie blames me—"

"I don't think she'll blame you. Olave's shown herself to be in need of something more than dear devoted Miss Ardern ever gave her."

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"And I'm to let them be engaged?"

"I think you would be wise to forbid any question of marriage for the next six months. Give them a little time to ascertain exactly how they stand. She's so awfully young, you know. And during that six months let her learn to be a good Catholic, so that she can help Guy to keep to the path he's chosen. I admire him, you know. I don't believe I could have done it myself. But it shows—doesn't it?—how strong a hold these things have in the long run. I believe you'll be able to trust him now even with your precious Olave."

"As he once said I should," said Felicity, in a low tone.

Clibborn rose and came over to where she was sitting and raised her hand to his lips.

"Felicity, give me the right to help—to advise—you. You've never given me that promised answer. Will you be my wife?"

"Yes," said Felicity.

CHAPTER XXXIII

LADY TRENT YIELDS

CLIBBORN had not been gone many minutes when Felicity heard a ring at the bell, followed swiftly by a sound of voices and footsteps on the stairs. She wondered who this second visitor, who had thus intrepidly faced the fog, could be. Yet, when the door was opened and Guy's name announced she felt scarcely any surprise. She told herself that she had been expecting him, and that this extraordinary day could hardly have terminated satisfactorily without a visit from him.

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Guy entered the room hesitatingly, as if but little sure of his welcome. But Felicity came forward and held out her hand. She was always self-possessed and charmingly unself-conscious.

"I hoped you would not refuse to receive me," he said. His voice was hard and emotionless, as if he were putting a considerable strain upon his own self-control. "But after all that has passed I felt that I owed you some explanation."

"Yes?" said Felicity.

The last time they had spoken to each other had been here, in this very room, when she had broken off her engagement to him, and had assured him in her anger that he should never see either herself or Olave again. Now she could only feel that in spite of all that had happened in the interval he had a right to be heard.

"You must not blame Olave," he continued. "She is very young, in many ways she is such a child still! It was easy enough for me to persuade her to disobey you—to meet me again and again in Ardern's Knoll. She has deceived you, I know, but she was not really to blame."

For had she not been as wax in his hands—as the soft clay in the hands of the potter? All that she had learned of deceit and perfidy she had learned from him.

His eagerness to shield Olave, to take the whole blame upon himself, touched Felicity. She was aware in that moment that all her old anger and resentment against him were dead.

"You do not know perhaps that I had planned to take her away from you? I had hoped to have married her to-morrow morning. Of course, I knew that there were difficulties in the way of my making a mixed marriage, but I did not know they would prove so formidable. I had to tell Olave it was im-

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possible for us to be married in this clandestine way. I think she understood that at least it was not my love for her that had failed."

His blue eyes were very bright and seemed to hold a kind of inward excitement.

"I am sure she understood," said Lady Trent. Then she added, "From what she told me when she came in this morning after seeing you."

"She told you then?"

"Yes, that your Church would not permit you to carry out the plan. And she made me understand, too, exactly how matters stood between you."

"Felicity," he said, speaking her name for the first time, "you must believe me when I tell you now that I am very sorry. You called me dishonorable once —do you remember?"

She bowed her head with a little gesture of assent.

"You had every right to call me that. But now I am going to put myself and Olave entirely into your hands. You must do as you wish with us. I have tried to take her from you and you see I have failed. But I love her."

He stood in front of her now in an attitude of entreaty, of contrition, of proud abasement.

"I love her," he repeated.

Felicity motioned him to a seat. He looked exhausted, as if he had passed through very difficult and fatiguing hours that had wearied both soul and body. And although she could only form a very slight estimate of the struggle in which he had fought and conquered, she knew it must have been a spiritual experience that would perhaps leave its mark upon his life forever.

"If you had not come this evening," said Lady Trent, "I had meant to ask Mr. Clibborn to go to see you. He is an old friend of ours and he is Olave's godfather. I asked him to come here to-day,

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as I wanted to discuss the matter with him. It was too difficult a task for me to cope with alone. But as you are here I may as well tell you of the decisions we arrived at. They concern both yourself and Olave."

He sat down near the fire, and for the first time a little ray of hope for the future crept into his heart.

"He agreed with me in the first place that if Olave still wishes to become a Roman Catholic I had better let her do so. She's wanted this I know for a long time."

His face brightened.

"You really mean that? Of course, it'll make all the difference in the world to her!"

"Yes, I believe it will. It'll give her something she needs very much—something that she's never really had. Alick Clibborn calls them spiritual props." She smiled, and her face grew soft and beautiful. "Guy, I want her to have a few months of quiet and serious preparation. You could perhaps spend the time abroad—I would rather you didn't see each other. She is very young, you know. But perhaps in six months if you're both of the same mind—"

She stopped short, aware that he was gazing at her with an incredulous astonishment.

"I won't keep you apart any more," she terminated.

For some little time Guy did not speak at all. With all his heart he blessed this unknown Clibborn, who had stepped in to confirm Felicity in her instinctive desire to give her daughter what she desired. His joy at the thought that Olave would share his faith was intense, and the little period of probation Lady Trent wished to impose upon them seemed a

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trivial price to pay for the happiness that he felt assured now would be ultimately theirs.

"Do you really mean this, Felicity?"

"Yes, I do so want to do what's best for her. And I'm sure—I feel—that I can trust you now."

"Even with Olave?" he said.

"Even with Olave," she answered gravely.

In the midst of the pause that followed the door was opened and Olave herself came into the room. She had returned to the house earlier in the afternoon, but hearing that Mr. Clibborn was with her mother she had preferred to go up to her own room. Now thinking that he must have gone she came down to see her.

The sight of Guy sitting there engaged in an apparently amicable conversation gave her something in the nature of a shock. She had imagined that perhaps she would not see him again for months, perhaps even for years, yet here he was, in what seemed the most natural way possible, talking to Lady Trent. But the sight of them bewildered Olave; she could hardly believe that she had seen aright. She turned away in her confusion and made a movement toward the door.

Felicity called her back.

"Olave, come here, dear."

Olave advanced slowly, longing to hear an explanation of this drastic change. She stood there looking from her mother to Guy, afraid to hope, afraid to believe, even now, that Felicity had relented.

"I have been telling Guy that I am not going to oppose your marriage any more," said Lady Trent. She spoke purposely in a matter-of-fact emotionless tone, for the situation was becoming tense, and she was sensitively aware of the presence of some powerful emotion, of relief, of gratitude, of love, she knew not what. "But I am going to ask you both to wait

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six months so that you may learn to be a Roman Catholic. Do you still wish to be one, Olave?"

"Yes, mother. Almost more than anything in the world."

Guy moved a step nearer to her and took her hand in his. It was dry and hot to the touch and trembled as it lay in his.

"Do you agree to that, Primavera?" he said.

Olave was silent, and during the little pause that followed, Lady Trent rose and went quietly out of the room. She still felt bewildered and confused by the sudden change which she had brought about under Clibborn's guidance, but now that it was actually achieved, her self-control threatened to give way. The sight of Guy and Olave standing there together had convinced her once for all that it would be wrong to oppose such love as theirs. She believed that Guy would make Olave a very happy woman. Their love had triumphed.

And in the drawing-room Olave was saying to him:

"What did you say to make her change like that?"

"I only told her the truth. But she said she had been discussing the matter with Mr. Clibborn and he had agreed with her about giving in. Olave, she made me feel a worm after all I'd done!"

"Oh, how could we have planned to hurt her like that?" said Olave, with a sudden, fierce remorse. It was as if the scales had dropped from her eyes. "What must you think of me, too, Guy? For you know even better than she does how often and often I've deceived her—lied to her! What must *you* think of me?" she repeated.

"I think you are going to leave one of the best women in the world for the most worthless of men," he answered.

Presently she said:

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"Will you forgive me, Guy? I want to go to her. Perhaps you will be allowed to come back to-morrow."

"Till to-morrow then," said Guy, unwilling to let her go, yet making no effort to detain her.

He took his departure. Lady Trent heard the front door slam as he went out and wondered a little that he had left so soon. But a moment later she was aware of footsteps on the stairs; her door was opened softly and Olave came into the room. Felicity felt her hands seized in that warm, young grasp, and a rain of mingled kisses and tears fell upon them. Olave was kneeling beside her, sobbing like a broken-hearted child.

She heard words of contrition, of gratitude, of love. She listened to them with a deep thanksgiving in her heart. Then she turned and drew Olave to her, gathering her in her arms and realizing that her child belonged to her forever, bound to her by enduring ties of love that nothing could destroy.

"My dear Olave," she said, "my dear, dear child."

THE END

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